

Sewell Stokes

**ISADORA
DUNCAN**

SEWELL STOKES

ISADORA DUNCAN

In this volume Mr. Stokes presents a picture of the real Isadora Duncan, shorn of the legends which surrounded her exotic personality. Mr. Stokes was a close friend of the dancer during the last year of her life and explains her art and peculiar personality with both sympathy and insight.

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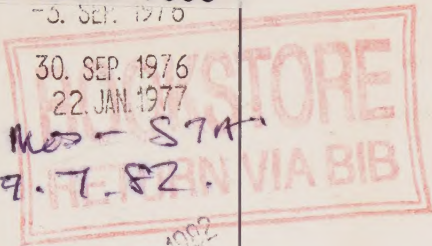
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ISADORA DUNCAN

ISADORA DUNCAN

AN INTIMATE PORTRAIT

SEWELL STOKES.

CE/MI
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FOR
RUTH MITCHELL
BECAUSE SHE KNEW ISADORA SO WELL
AND
LESLIE STOKES
BECAUSE HE DID NOT KNOW HER AT ALL

The way a man faces failure is the best proof of him. What he has done before matters little, or only in a minor degree, if as the outcome of all, in the grip of final and irretrievable ruin, he retains the stature of a man. That places him far more truly than the verdicts of juries, or the judgment of contemporary society. Sometimes he may prove his worth more surely by failure than by success, sometimes may only just manage to hold his ground; but if he is able to do that without complaint or greedy self-justification, and without speaking bitterly of those who have compassed his downfall, even so something stands to his credit, and there is a balance on the right side.

LAURENCE HOUSMAN.

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I

“**W**HAT an unpleasant book to have written,” is what several persons, when they have looked at my portrait of Isadora, will say. They will remember its intimacies only because of their dislike of them, and quite a number will assure themselves that nobody, who was not caddish, could have written what I have written about a dead woman who was my friend. Having said, or thought, as much, they will put my work on one side and look forward to the next conventional book of memoirs to be published. And when they have followed in this conventional volume the well-chosen adventures of some celebrated personality, and laughed at the many anecdotes contained in it about other celebrities, they may remember my book again, and by comparison find it even more odious than before. To these people,

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whose false conception of truth and beauty causes them to interest themselves in only the published, and often *intentionally* pleasing side of a celebrity's life, I have nothing to say, except that I have probably even less patience with them than they have with me.

It was on a wet afternoon in Genoa, some months before I met Isadora, that the idea first occurred to me of writing a realistic memoir. I was sitting in what I think is the most difficult place to read, a perfectly furnished room, but the book I had chosen so thrilled me that I forgot my surroundings. I knew, as I began Mr. D. H. Lawrence's introduction to "M.M.'s" *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion*, that seldom before had my interest been so firmly held by anything I had read, that never before had I come across such a brilliantly etched portrait of a man's human weaknesses. And I said to myself, when I had finished Mr. Lawrence's long essay, that if ever I was able to write anything half as convincing as his account of "M.M.'s" character, I should have justification for my conceit. But in my admiration for the author's work I did not forget the enormous possibilities which his subject, and particularly the peculiar

circumstances in which he was allowed to observe his subject, had afforded him. And I despaired of ever being given the opportunity of attempting to do what Mr. Lawrence had already done so successfully. Which was a pity, for he had written, it seemed to me, a memoir beside which most other memoirs appeared as of little importance. That, I considered to be something very well worth doing.

That night at dinner I spoke to the friends with whom I was staying, about the book which had so much impressed me. All of them, I think, agreed with me that it was brilliant, but not one of them failed to admit that it had left a nasty taste in his mouth, and my host went so far as to say that he thought Mr. Lawrence 'a cad' to have written it.

My desire to write a realistic memoir, conceived after reading Mr. Lawrence's example, is, curiously enough, more closely linked to the present effort than by my mere decision to apply his truthful methods to the character of my late friend. For the "M.M." of Mr. Lawrence's memoir, I subsequently discovered, was at one time concerned with Isadora herself. Re-reading the book during those weeks in which I was

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seeing a great deal of Isadora, I noticed that he was referred to as having been for some years "manager to Isadora Duncan." When I asked her about him, though, she said that he had only been her secretary ; and added that for certain reasons she would rather not read the book. These reasons of hers I will make clear later. In them is contained the seed of one of the many tragedies that seemed to find in Isadora the light of their bitter inspiration.

* * * * *

In the darkness of my bedroom I heard the maid's voice say : " A friend of yours is dead, sir. 'Tragic Death of Isadora Duncan.' It's on all the posters." Then she pulled back the curtains and let in a flood of light that was as blinding to me as the news had been, and I noticed her watching me closely. The next instant I was feeling guilty because my nature had denied her the little drama she expected from me—the tears without which, on such occasions, the *crêpe-souled* proletariat is never really satisfied.

I felt stunned ; even when my reason returned and I was able to admit to myself that after all

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no more likely event than this could have happened, I dared not pick up the newspaper to read the details. That Isadora had not died a placid death between soft sheets, with a grave-faced doctor at the bedside, I felt certain. I should have been as certain of it even if the maid had not said 'tragic' death, for there were so few placid moments in my friend's life; and she herself had told me, not so very long before, that she quite expected her end to be in some way dramatic.

"A sort of climax, you know," she said, in her fascinating American voice, as we walked back from a cinema one evening. "The kind of thing my public expects of me. Nothing dull or ordinary."

While the paper remained unfolded in my hand, my mind flashed through the darkness of the past four months, and relit in my imagination the occasions which Isadora's presence had so firmly engraved upon it. I saw myself meeting her for the first time at her flat, and leaving her after dinner with the impression that she was merely the ruin of a stupid woman. Not a very beautiful ruin. And before my mind had time to scold itself for the foolishness of that hasty

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conclusion, it had taken me on to Isadora's room at the Hotel Negresco. There, among that glorious riot of colour which turned even her gross untidiness into a thing of beauty, she sat, while the dawn broke over the sea, sketching for me the tragedies of her life. Again, I was watching Isadora for the last time, as she walked up the dusty steps of Nice station to catch a train for Paris—a familiar figure, natty in a brown fur coat badly split down the back, waddling slightly as she walked. She did not know that I was watching her from the window of my little hotel directly opposite the station. Three days before I had said that I would see her off to Paris, and three times since then I had made the attempt. But each time she had changed her mind at the last minute, deciding either to go by another train, or not to go at all. She was being more than usually erratic and I am ashamed to say that in the end I lost patience with her. So it was G——, the young artist who had first introduced me to her, who alone stood on the platform while the Blue Train took her out of both our lives. She was travelling in an expensive compartment only because her ticket had been bought for her. She had not had enough

money even to tip her porter properly, and had promised to send him the difference when she got to Paris. Until she reached Paris—since meals on the train cost more than the few francs left in her red leather bag—she had only a few oranges between herself and starvation.

I received one last letter from Isadora after that inglorious parting from Nice. A rather pathetic letter, largely scrawled in purple ink. In it she asked me if I would write an article about her for one of the big French newspapers. "You know I can still dance," she wrote, "because you have watched me in the studio lately, but some of the people here won't believe me when I tell them that I can."

That letter, and the porter to whom she had apparently forgotten to send his money, helped me more than anything else to realize the extent of her fall from the dazzling position she had once held in the world. For whenever I happened to go to the station with G——,—which was often, as I bought my papers from the book-stall there—the porter would come running up to us and ask: "Have you heard from Madame yet? Has she not sent my money?" But I was not sorry for him. He was a very fat,

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healthy-looking porter, of the kind that flourishes on the Riviera for a few years, and can after that afford to retire comfortably.

As I write, I realize that even in the first few paragraphs I have failed to keep to any sequence in this story. Perhaps that is because a sequence of any kind was the last thing one considered in any experience that had to do with Isadora. Her mind was big enough—as I tried one day to explain to a very conventional lady in my hotel—to be unconscious of space and time as they are reckoned with, in countries and in minutes.

“Isadora,” I said to this good lady, “is a genius. When I was endeavouring to be practical with her the other afternoon, she turned on me suddenly, and with a great appeal in her wonderful eyes said: ‘Oh how practical you are! Why are you so practical? Why is *everybody* so practical? Everybody except poor Isadora. The men and women I meet think life is just Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday—and then the funeral! That’s all they think. I can’t understand it.’” “She said that to you, when you were trying to *help* her?” gasped the lady in the hotel. “Well!” And the fair down on

her upper lip seemed visibly to bristle as she added, a trifle sarcastically : “ Your friend Miss Duncan may have lovely eyes, but she’s obviously mad. And I’ve heard . . . ”

What had they not heard those English spinster ladies from the suburbs of London, who wintered on the Riviera ? To them, at first, the name Isadora Duncan meant nothing. But when they had heard it repeated several times by the little page-boy—who I think used rather to like bursting into that quiet dining-room with the announcement that “ La Duncan wishes to speak with you on the ’phone ”,—their curiosity was aroused. After that they recognised the name when it appeared in the newspapers—which it did frequently at that time—and at what they read, and subsequently heard about the famous dancer, their plumes waved with indignation and their bloodless lips became hard lines.

“ I’m not at all sure,” each one of them said to me in turn, “ that your friendship with Miss Duncan . . . ”

And if ever they saw me out with Isadora, who must have appeared to them as a creature fantastic in the extreme, they looked the other way,

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pretending not to have seen us. But they never forgot to mention, with icy casualness, the incident to me afterwards. Then I would tell Isadora what they had said, and she would be very amused.

My first meeting with Isadora : that at least can find a definite place in the story, though what follows it becomes no more than a number of recent memories, assorted from an experience which seems to me now to be more than anything like a brilliant dream that will never fade.

On a warm summer evening, in Nice, G——, who was staying with me, took me to see Isadora. He knew her only very slightly, having met her with his friend Augustus John when she had last danced in London, some years before. She had asked us to call on her at her flat at half past five. I shall never forget the exigencies of that walk. Believing the flat to be only a short distance from the centre of the town we started off gaily along the Promenade des Anglais. But it was only after walking three miles in the sun, and being covered with the dust of passing cars, that at last we arrived, an hour late. But our lateness was of no consequence. We had another hour and a half

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to wait before our hostess made her appearance. We were shown by Josephine, Isadora's maid—whose whining voice I was later to hear her mistress reproduce exactly, for Isadora was a perfect mimic—into a badly furnished room with French windows opening on to a balcony overlooking the sea. On one of the walls was pinned the cheapest reproduction of a Botticelli painting. On another hung a large photograph of Isadora. After we had been waiting about ten minutes Josephine, who was grey-haired, short-sighted, and slightly deaf, came back into the room and added to the decorations. Ignoring us entirely, and with the assurance of a highly paid publicity agent, she tacked on to the wall with a hammer and four nails a large poster advertising a forthcoming performance of Isadora Duncan's. Then, having satisfied herself that this was straight—which it was not—she looked from the poster to us, and back again, as much as to say "Take notice of that, young men," and at once left the room.

The scene having now been set for the play, there entered two young boys, replacing those two servants of crude French comedy, who while pretending to dust the furniture, discuss for the

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benefit of the audience all that it is good for them to know about the heroine. They were an American artist, and a French actor. In their eyes I thought I noticed a faint antipathy to our presence, but being members of the household—which included in addition to themselves Isadora and Josephine—they insisted on our waiting until we had seen Isadora.

“You must wait,” said the young American, with a charming smile, “Isadora would never forgive us, or herself, if she missed you. She loves new faces. She’s lonely now. There are just the three of us—and Josephine. Isadora’s been over to Juan-les-Pins to swim. We’re expecting her back at any moment.”

We all went out on to the balcony and waited for another half-hour. We talked, mostly about Isadora, and at the same time I looked critically at the photograph of her that I could still see through the half-open window.

It was the photograph of a very beautiful girl. She was as simply clad as a nun, in a long-sleeved white robe that reached to her feet. She sat on what appeared to be a wooden table, her clasped hands resting in her lap. Her hair was parted in a straight line down the middle of her

head, and what must have struck anybody who looked at the picture was the marvellous simplicity of the sitter's face. An artist of the Victorian era, would, I imagine, have chosen just such a model for the picture of a conventional saint. I cannot remember ever having seen a more peaceful, and at the same time inspired face.

"She's not much like that now," said the American, following the direction of my glances ; and before I had time to make any reply we were all of us leaning over the edge of the balcony to see who it was that had driven up to the flat in a small car.

It was Raymond Duncan, Isadora's brother, so well-known in Paris because he walks about the streets dressed in the flowing robes of ancient Greece, who stepped out of the car, accompanied by two small children who were referred to as his disciples. With his grey hair falling in straight lines to his shoulders, and his pointed features, he reminded me of nothing so much as a rather dirty Red Indian. Dirty, because the dust had changed his inconvenient clothes from white to palest mud colour. Disdaining to enter by the front door, he climbed up over the balcony,

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and when he had given his two disciples into the charge of Josephine, who at that moment appeared mysteriously from somewhere at the back of the flat, he allowed himself to be introduced to us. He seemed a nice, informal sort of person, but I found it difficult to forgive him for spoiling my conception of what the Greeks looked like. But I don't suppose he regarded G—— or myself with any particular enthusiasm. On reflection it seems to me that he had every reason then to regard us with a certain amount of contempt.

“Another couple of young spongers come to hang round my sister,” is the mental phrase with which at the time he probably dismissed us.

Another half-hour went by. The blue of the sea gradually merged into the blue of the sky. Then, at last, the car in which Isadora and an American woman friend of hers had driven from Juan-les-Pins, suddenly stood still in the road underneath us. The door of it opened very slowly, and I was given my first sight of the most famous dancer of her generation.

Isadora Duncan stood on the pavement looking up at us. I am not certain now how I had expected she would look. Certainly I had not

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thought she would be like the photo of her which I had admired on the wall. That, obviously, had been taken many years ago. But I am equally certain that I did not expect to find myself looking at a figure and personality so entirely divorced from any of my previous conceptions of her. I was frankly shocked. For I was looking at a stout woman with an uncovered head of flaming red hair, whose pale features had been badly touched up with rouge. Only her lovely wistful eyes looked as if they claimed no relationship with the rest of her, and the sweet smile that played sorrowfully round her mouth almost made me forget the rest.

“Raymond—and four beautiful young men ; all looking like a frieze by Titian,” she said.

They were the first words I heard Isadora speak, and her voice surprised me. From a woman, looking as she looked, in wine-red draperies, like a full-blown peony against a darkening background, I had expected to hear the dramatic intonations of a Mrs. Patrick Campbell. But instead I heard a light American drawl that might have passed unnoticed anywhere.

But her personality was amazing. She had not been inside the flat two minutes before the

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atmosphere was charged with an indescribable mysticism. From the moment of her entrance, the room became as much a part of her as her own body, and all of us were moving round her like planets round the sun. To each of the two boys of the household—"I call them my *deux petits pigeons*", she said—she gave an affectionate embrace; and to us, her new visitors, she extended her hands, allowing us to kiss them.

"I *have* got nice arms," she said, looking at us very intently; and she added, with a sigh: "but then the arms are the last of a woman's glories to fade."

After that remark she looked wistfully sorry for herself.

In spite of our polite refusals she insisted on our staying to dinner.

"There's nothing in the house to eat," she cried, "and I'm too poor to buy anything, so we'll have to go round to the restaurant next door for a meal. And Ruthie"—she nodded towards the American girl who had come with her in the car—"will pay the bill. If you boys go on and order the meal for us, Ruthie and I will be along in a moment."

No kinder girl than the Ruthie of this story

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ever lived. But I think that night she could cheerfully have killed both my friend and myself. For she had, she told me afterwards, hoped to get Isadora to practise for her coming recital without having any dinner at all. And this she might have succeeded in doing if two new young men had not presented themselves at a critical time. As it was she could do nothing.

“We’ll have a *wonderful* dinner,” said Isadora, throwing back her wild head of red hair and holding out her white arms to the sky. “*Such* a dinner.”

“We’ll have a little cold meat, and some potatoes—for the others,” Ruthie said crushingly. “That’s all I’ll sign the bill for.” She turned to us appealingly. “I’ll love to have you as my guests,” she went on, “but help me see that dear Isadora doesn’t *touch* a potato. She has to practise after dinner to-night. If she doesn’t she’ll never make a success of the recital on Thursday. And we all want her to.”

“Now dear, good, sweet little Ruthie,” said Isadora, “I love you very much, and I don’t know what I should do without you; but to-night I’m hungry and I can’t dance until I’ve had my dinner.”

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Suddenly Josephine appeared in the midst of us, and informed Isadora in her poor squeaky voice, that the musician was waiting for Madame to go and dance in the studio.

"The musician can wait," commanded Isadora, in such a gentle, child-like voice that nobody had the heart to contradict her. "He can wait until I've had my dinner." And ignoring the others standing round, Isadora suddenly gave me a most disarming smile, and took me into her confidence.

"You know," she told me, in a fascinatingly quiet way that was all her own, "I can get thin if I want to. Anybody can—simply by following the examples of the saints in the Bible. All you have to do is to drink orange-juice and cups of hot tea. Take them alternately. You mustn't touch anything else. For the first two or three days it's terrible. You feel so hungry you think you'll go mad. But after a time it begins to feel less painful, and in the end it's *perfectly* wonderful. You can't imagine how wonderful it is. Everything becomes intensified. Your mind is so clear that you are aware of every detail of what is going on all round you. And you feel as if you're walking on clouds. In

fact you *are* inspired. I've sometimes gone on to the stage in that state and made a great success. That was the secret of those old saints. They starved because it gave them strength; it helped them to see their visions. Remember that, if ever you want to do inspired work."

I told her that I would remember it, and asked her some particular question; but she seemed not to hear me, and went on talking.

"Of course," she said. "There's really no need for most women to worry about being fat. Why do they? After all a woman's brains are near her stomach, they come up from there. Just as a man's brains are in his head, and come down. I'm not just saying this"—she looked at me seriously—"it's really true. The great women I've known personally—Duse, Bernhardt, Ellen Terry—*all* of them had large stomachs when they were in their prime . . ."

At last we sat down to dinner in the roof-garden of the restaurant, and Isadora joined the party a few minutes later. It was not a cold night, and the distance from her flat to the dinner-table was only a matter of a few yards, but for some unknown reason she had jammed on her head an old straw hat. The effect of

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this was extraordinary when contrasted with her bare arms and clinging draperies ; and she looked in the crude light like the kind of figure Aubrey Beardsley might have designed to scare away birds from his window-box. And she had not sat down at the table long, before, having carefully avoided the glances of the watchful Ruthie she surreptitiously brushed some potatoes off my plate on to her own.

“Poor Ruthie,” she said to me, “it’s really a shame. She’s so good to me, and I behave so badly. I ought to be practising now. But I love potatoes—and young men. That’s my trouble ! Blasco Ibanez, the novelist, called me the ‘female Casanova of America’ ; and I think he’s right. Such a nice man Ibanez, though rather greedy. But then he has the best cook in the world. I’ve never tasted anything like it. One can’t ask a man like that out to dinner. It would be an insult, because you couldn’t hope to give him the kind of food he’s used to . . .”

A worried-looking waiter came at that moment to whisper something into Isadora’s ear. When she heard what the man said, her face at once became troubled.

“Poor Josephine,” she cried to the table at

large, "has got nothing to eat. She's sent over a message from the flat to say there's nothing in the kitchen, and she's hungry. But I thought," she said turning to one of the *deux petits pigeons*, "that there was something in the kitchen."

"There *was*," replied the American boy, "but remember, Isadora, you gave that to the poor woman who came round begging this morning."

"Of course, how silly of me to forget." She turned to the waiter. "Send my maid in whatever she wants, and put it down on the bill. And oh!" she turned to Raymond, "your disciples, who are with Josephine, want something to eat, too."

"Well so long as they don't eat meat," said Raymond, who was himself only eating meagre-looking vegetables, "it doesn't matter. A little soup will do for them."

I felt glad, as I heard Raymond say that, that I was not one of his disciples. To lead their austere life, on vegetarian diet, sounded very unattractive. My sympathies were all with his son, who some years ago ran away to America with a man who offered him a nice steak to eat, with a silk hat and a pair of trousers, in place of

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his Greek robes. But Raymond, as I learned from the conversation which followed, means well.

"When people come begging to me in Paris," said Isadora, "and I've nothing to give them, I tell them to go and call on little brother Raymond. He never turns anybody away without giving them something, do you, Raymond?"

"No," said Raymond, "I never send them away without food, but I make them work for it. Chopping wood mostly. It's surprising, though, how many of them melt away when they hear they've got to work to earn a meal."

It was difficult for me, looking at Isadora that first evening, to realise that to thousands of people all over the world she stood out as the complete disciple of beauty; a woman whose life-work had been the cult of the simplicity of nature. She appeared altogether unlike her severely simple brother.

"We're none of us alike in our family," Isadora told me, jokingly, later. "My mother, who was very beautiful must have betrayed poor father over and over again." Though I tried hard to associate her with the picture of the beautiful young girl I had seen in her flat, it was

only the Isadora of the Sunday newspapers that I saw each time: the Isadora Duncan whose private affairs and personal tragedies somehow found their way into every sensational newspaper published in Europe and America. At times she did remind me of a large statue of a woman that I had seen once in Rome; but now the statue was painted, and wore a red wig and a straw hat.

I think she must have noticed how carefully I watched her on that evening before we became friends. Perhaps being really one of the most sensitive of women under her outward covering of dramatic flamboyance, she felt a little afraid of my young, cheaply cynical eyes.

"Don't you think," she said, leaning towards me across the table, "that the light is rather bright? Too bright, I think it's a little too bright for me. Take this—" She snatched the straw hat from her head—"and make a lamp-shade."

I took the hat and did the best I could with it. When I had finished it looked like a kind of inverted bowl, and the light, reaching us now through the thin straw, was dimmed.

"That's better," she said, and thanked me.

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“Now what’s the matter ?” and she turned to the waiter, who had again returned. “Well,” I heard her tell the waiter, “the musician can go on waiting. He *must* wait. I’ll come to the studio as soon as I’ve finished my dinner. But I must finish my dinner, mustn’t I ?”

She appealed to the waiter. The waiter bowed, and left to pacify the weary musician.

Soon after this there was a crackling sound, and the unpleasant smell of burning straw.

“There goes my poor hat,” said Isadora. “It cost fifteen francs, and I’ve only got one other. Never mind,” she laughed, “in the *Eclaireur* this morning my name was mentioned among the bathers on Juan-les-Pins beach. ‘Isadora Duncan’—it was printed quite clearly. So I’m famous at last. And now that I’m famous I’ll make so much money that we’ll all be able to have a wonderful time, and I’ll be able to buy a new straw hat !”

“As if you weren’t famous enough, Isadora !” somebody cried.

“Yes,” she said, suddenly very wistful again, “that’s my trouble, I’m too famous. People keep watching me to see what I’m going to do next, and whatever I do they exaggerate it, and

send it round to all the newspapers in the world. Too famous—that's what's wrong with me."

"But you must write your memoirs," said the American boy. "You know"—he turned to me—"Isadora's been asked to write her memoirs."

"Yes," said Isadora, "and I suppose I'll have to do it, because I need the money so badly. But I don't want to write them—not unless I can have heaps of time, and write them properly, all myself."

"But you'll make money if you write what the publishers want," said Raymond.

"What do they want?" I asked.

"Anecdotes, and a suspicion of scandal," said Isadora.

"And you don't want the scandals mentioned," I suggested.

"Of course I do," cried Isadora; "but properly mentioned. Not just as cheap scandals—the sort of dirty things they print about me in the Sunday papers. When I write my memoirs I want to put down *everything*, in my own words, just as it happened to me. But really *everything*. Because what looked like cheap scandals to the world, didn't seem like

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that to me, at the time. I've never been ashamed of being in love. And I've often been in love. I've had a very interesting life. But then so had Duse. And look what they've done to poor Duse. Have you read her biography? Why, they've made the poor darling a saint. And she never pretended to be that. Poor Duse!" And I saw that as Isadora spoke of her old friend she was inwardly very moved—"What a thing to have happened to her. The greatest actress in the world dies, and they just smother her with whitewash. Look at Ellen Terry's book—it was so *dull*. But then Ellen Terry's the sweetest, kindest woman living, and I expect when she wrote her book she was thinking of her children. But I've *no* children, and *no* husband to think of; so I could write the *truth*."

"Then write the book you want to write," I said.

"I haven't time, or the peace of mind to do it really well, as I'd like to do it," she answered. "I'd have to go away in the country somewhere, away from everybody, and take a long time to think it all out. But it would be worth doing. Because I'd leave *nothing* out. And

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once I'd said everything they wouldn't be able to whitewash me after my death. My book would read like Rousseau's *Confessions*."

"But there would be some things you couldn't write," said G—— to Isadora. "Wouldn't there? Things too private, that you wouldn't want to write."

"I'd write them all the same. Why not? Nothing about my life is private any longer. I belong to the public so much that whatever I said would be better for them to hear than what they've already heard. I'd cease to be misunderstood. What a change that would be!"

I do not think, that anybody, hearing Isadora say those words, and seeing in her eyes the thoughts for the past which misted them with tears, would have objected. I'm certain they wouldn't.

Talking about the memoirs, which that evening were so vague in her mind, and which I had no idea would later bring us together, I remember she mentioned D'Annunzio.

"I never loved him as I might have done," she said, "it wouldn't have been fair to Duse, who was my greatest friend at the time. But D'Annunzio is the greatest lover in the world.

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He's ugly—very ugly—but that doesn't matter to a woman so long as the things he says to her are perfect. And D'Annunzio always said perfect things to me. He took my hands in his one day, and said he thought they were very beautiful. Well, quite a number of men had said that before him. But he said something else, too. He said: 'Isadora, you've got the hands of one of Michael Angelo's angels.'" When she had said that, Isadora was silent for a few minutes, and I saw that she was thinking of the past. It was when Isadora thought of the past that she still looked beautiful. Then one could imagine her more easily as the original of the girl in the picture.

"You see," she said, coming out of her dream, "so many men would have said: 'Isadora, you've got hands like rose petals'; but *only* D'Annunzio, the greatest of lovers, could have said, 'Isadora, you've got the hands of one of Michael Angelo's angels.'"

That the repetition of this compliment from the Italian poet pleased Isadora, even more than the brandy she sipped from time to time, was obvious. For on her face, each time she said them, there appeared a look of ecstasy.

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“Since the brandy is paid for,” said Isadora, as we all rose from the table, “we may as well take it home with us.” And seizing the bottle with one hand, and myself with the other, she left the table.

We made an odd procession, the seven of us, as we proceeded downstairs, and the kind of impression we made on the diners, as we passed through the dining-room on the ground-floor of the restaurant, was obvious from their expressions. I suppose one could not blame them. Raymond in his Greek robes, Isadora in flaming draperies, clutching a brandy bottle and a young man (and wearing the half burnt straw hat), must have presented a spectacle which was strange, even to residents on the French Riviera.

But I have blamed myself since for the hasty judgment I formed that evening—a judgment which, I was to realise later, was merely the prejudiced conceit of a small mind. For as I walked back home in silence, I was still unaware that it had been my privilege to dine with a genius. It seemed to me then, I recollect, that I had had a strange experience. But if anybody had stopped me in the street, and asked me to describe it, I should have answered

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then that I had come from a ruined Greek temple which had somehow grown up in Nice, and that the priestess of the temple had been disguised as a tragedy queen from a melodrama of the eighteen-nineties.

For that was my first impression of Isadora.

II

AFTER that evening's meeting with Isadora I did not see her again for three months. I had promised her, before leaving the flat, to go to the recital she was giving on the following Thursday. But the tickets, I discovered on inquiry, were a hundred francs each, and frankly, I did not consider it worth paying as much as that for a seat in her studio to watch such a fat woman try to be graceful. For at that time, like many others of my own generation whom I had met, and who had seen Isadora recently, while regretting that I had not seen her dance in her prime, I had no wish to watch her at the end of her illustrious career.

I went to Genoa the following month, and not long afterwards Isadora left Nice for Paris. It was not until the beginning of 1927 that we met again.

In the meantime I thought very little about the strange, flamboyant personality with whom I had dined. In Italy I found so many other

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things to interest me that I almost forgot all about Isadora. Though not quite. For from time to time either her name was mentioned, or a paragraph about her appeared in one of the newspapers, and then I smiled at the memory of some quaint things she had said to me. And it was in Genoa that a man, who had seen her even more recently than I had, told me how Isadora, one night at Villefranche, infuriated a countess, who was trying to be her best friend. The countess, who pretended to be, with Isadora, a lover of natural beauty, and one who despised the artificialities of this world, must somehow have got on the dancer's nerves. Because suddenly, expressing her agreement with the countess about the uselessness of outward show, Isadora relieved the horrified woman of her hat and her pearls, and going to the water's edge, dropped them gently in. It was an amusing story, and one that I have since realized to be very expressive of Isadora's drastically sincere personality. But although, when I heard it, I decided that if ever I met Isadora again, I would ask her to tell it me in her own words, I never did.

My second meeting with Isadora (which I did

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not know at the time to be the first of a series of daily encounters during which she told me so many things about herself, and revealed to me so clearly the depths of her mind), took place in the small office, off the Avenue de la Victorine, of a Mrs. Nickson who was then doing some typing for me, and who was also working for Isadora.

As she came into it, Isadora seemed entirely to fill the room. She looked so strange that one could easily understand people turning round in the street to look at her. She wore on her head what was nothing more than a faded felt "shape" hat, and from this peeped wisps of hair that were red, but not of the same shade of red as when I had last seen her. Round her neck was wound a light green scarf, and her short, shabby brown fur coat was split down the back. She looked really sorry for herself, as I remembered she had looked that evening at dinner when she had made the remark to me about a woman's arms being the last of her glories to fade. And from that time, until my last glimpse of her, three months before her death—from the bedroom window of my hotel—I never saw that expression leave her dear face. Except at

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times when she either danced, or listened to music.

"But of course I remember you," she said, looking at me very wistfully. "I have been in Paris. But now I am staying in Nice again for some time. You must come and see me."

She sat down on a little chair that made her look even fatter than she was.

"I've decided to write my memoirs," she said. "A publisher has given me a contract. I've got it here somewhere."

While she rummaged about in the depths of the red leather bag she always carried with her, I asked: "And what has become of the two boys I met at your flat; the *deux petits pigeons*? Are they back in Nice, too?"

"Oh, no." She stopped rummaging in her bag. "No, they disappeared when I got to Paris. Like smoke you know, people usually leave me—I never leave them. When I was younger, and I had my school, I trained ever so many little girls. I adopted them, and brought them up very carefully, and taught them the secrets of my dancing. And they used to tell me how much they loved me, and how they would never forget me. But they went away, and after

a little while they forgot all about me." Isadora paused. "I've often wondered since," she went on, "if it wouldn't perhaps have been wiser of me, if instead of little girls, I'd adopted little boys. I feel they'd have come back to me. If once little boys had loved me, they'd have loved me always, I think." Suddenly her great eyes lit up with a kind of weak fire that was in them, and she said : "But have you seen Mitri ? But you must." And when she had called to Mitri, and the young Russian pianist came blinking from the light outside into the shadowed interior of the shop, she turned to me in front of him, and said, "Isn't he perfectly sweet !"

Dear Mitri, you were very sweet, standing, and smiling and bowing in the shop that morning. I have not used your real name here because you might not wish it used, and I have no idea where you are to be found. But when we do meet again, as we shall do one day I expect, I shall be able to tell you how much the thought of you meant to a great woman. For when you were in Paris, and Isadora was alone in Nice, it was the thought that she would be seeing you again which kept her from being more depressed than she was. "You two," Isadora was always saying

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to my friend and myself, during those days, "are saving me from doing foolish things, because I cannot bear to be alone." But it was really only the thought of you, Mitri, that gave her any kind of spirit to keep on. She would talk of you quite suddenly, and wonder if you were all right, and ask me if I thought you were thinking about her. And when she received a letter from you, she became, instantly, a happy woman again. I have not seen you since that morning in the office, Mitri, but I must like you, as I must like anybody who meant such a very great deal to poor Isadora.

Not long after that chance meeting with Isadora in the office, an account of her attempted suicide appeared in the French papers. It became the sensation of the hour. From Cannes to Menton, it was discussed by the wealthy people who are only too thankful to have anything to discuss. Though it was said in some of the papers that Miss Duncan, when "interviewed" denied that she had ever meant to end her life, many people still held to the idea that she had really intended suicide. Certainly the subsequent newspaper accounts of what had taken place on the night when Isadora, wrapped in a

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purple cloak, with the water rising as far as her chin, had been dragged out of the Mediterranean by an English captain, were very unconvincing.

It was the *Daily Express*, as far as I remember, who brought Rex Ingram, the film producer, into the affair. Probably other London papers did the same. In this account of the event it was said that Isadora Duncan had left the party in her studio, and to settle a bet had gone to see for how long she could stand in cold water. Mr. Ingram's name being mentioned, the party immediately assumed, in the popular imagination, the atmosphere of Hollywood as it is believed by ignorant people to be. Presently one or two of the local French papers described the party as an "orgy", and the wise ones—including all the prim English visitors in my hotel—shook their piled up heads of hair, or stroked their Kitchener moustaches, and said :

"Remember the Arbuckle case . . . These Film people . . . dreadful!"

Isadora's own account of what had taken place, written by her for a weekly journal published on the Riviera, and telling how she had been dancing along the edge of the waves, and had slipped into the sea, was even more uncon-

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vincing. From the papers it was impossible to learn what had really taken place.

But a few days later I received, through Mrs. Nickson, an invitation to go and see Isadora in her studio.

“Isadora,” said Mrs. Nickson, “is so lonely. She’s terribly difficult to work for because she’s so erratic. Go and see her if you have time. She isn’t in her flat any longer, but she goes out to her studio each day to see if there are any letters for her. She said she’d love to see you.”

I went the next morning to see Isadora in her studio. From the white sunlight of the glaring promenade I passed suddenly into an immense green room which immediately reminded me of an imagined temple at the bottom of the sea. The curtains, hanging all round in long folds from the ceiling, gave it the appearance of a gigantic green tent. The carpet was also green, and the huge space of the place was dimly lit by lights fashioned to resemble torches set in braziers. There was a grand piano which looked minute in the great room; a gramophone on a tiny stool, an oil stove, a screen, and an immense pile of deep orange cushions. And on the cushions, still in her brown fur coat, with the split in the

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back, sat Isadora. In the light of the room, which was vague, she looked like the ghost of herself ; a spirit from some other world which had returned to the earth, and to make itself more visible had dabbed a little paint and powder on its face. Her eyes were full of sorrow that morning ; her smile very unconvincing.

She seemed a little nervous of me at first, and after she had said how pleased she was that I had come, because she was so lonely, she held out her hand for the book I had with me. It was volume II of *My Life*, by Frank Harris, a book which is not allowed to be published in England, and is only privately circulated.

“ I’ve wanted to read that for a long time,” she said, in her soft American voice ; “ will you lend it me ? ” She looked at me for a moment, and smiled. “ I’m sure it’s not the kind of book you’d lend most of your friends ; but then I *am* the female Casanova of America.”

While she turned over the pages, and laughed a little to herself at some of the things she read, my eyes became more used to the room. I noticed now that at one end, high above a mass of cushions which led like a sloping bank up to it, there was a stage. On the piano was a stack of

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ragged music, and the least expected object in that fantastic room—a portable typewriter—stood in the middle of the floor. I have bothered to describe the room because in an indefinite way it expressed Isadora's personality. Particularly the typewriter and the gramophone, which both looked depressed, out of place, and thoroughly ashamed of themselves. Their contrast with the rest of the room and its furniture was exactly like the contrast to be found in Isadora's outlook on life. This she exemplified for me some days later, as we sat at a café overlooking a magnificent chain of hills sweeping downwards to the sea.

“To think,” she said, “that those are the same hills which inspired Nietzsche—that great man. Did you know that Nietzsche was a dancer, as well as a philosopher? He was; and he sat looking at those same hills, and thought out dreams for the world. And now think of the people who come to the Riviera each year, and look on the same beauties of nature, and are only inspired to dance the Black-Bottom, and drink everlasting cocktails!”

For several minutes after that Isadora remained lost in thought, her eyes staring fixedly

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at the blue hills. Then, quite suddenly, she turned to me, and said : " Sewell, for God's sake pour me out another cocktail. I'm dying of thirst again. And really, I do think a cocktail is the most wonderful thing in this life. I'm certain it is."

Isadora really loved that big green and orange studio of hers. After her personal relationships it meant more to her than anything else. Nobody who had seen her, one evening, as she walked round it with tears in her eyes, taking up bunches of curtain from the floor, and kissing them desperately, could have doubted that. For those were her old stage curtains which had been round the world with her ; and the sentimental value she attached to them was an influential factor at the end of her life, when the triumphs she had experienced in front of them seemed to her so distant.

" They say," she cried that evening, " that if I don't pay my debts they will take away my studio and everything in it. But they can't want my curtains. They aren't worth anything, except to me. And to me they mean so *much*."

Presently she put aside the Frank Harris book she had been glancing through, and said :

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"Well, here I am still ; and the purple cloak I tried to drown myself in, is at the cleaners."

"Then you *did* try to commit suicide ? "

She did not answer me directly. She was thinking, probably, that perhaps she had said too much. Then she said :

"I was quite alone in the room, you see. A few people had been with me, and when they went away for a moment I felt more alone in the world than I'd ever felt before. All the stories in the papers about the 'orgy' are imagined. Rex Ingram wasn't here at all. There was hardly anything to eat in the house, and *nothing* to drink. If there had been, I should never have done what I did ; I'd have been too happy ! But the papers turn my quietest parties into hectic orgies. It makes a better story for them I suppose. And I had to write that story about myself dancing, and slipping into the sea, to please my friends. Some of them are getting up a subscription to save my house in Paris from being seized for debt. And a suicide story would have upset their plans. But this is what really happened"

At this point of the story we were interrupted by a loud knocking on the studio door.

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“There’s never a single minute’s peace wherever I am,” sighed Isadora. “Would you mind seeing who it is ? ”

I let into the studio an excited Frenchman ; a red-faced little bourgeois who was mostly paunch and watch-chain. He demanded of me : “ Is Madame Duncan in ? ” And before I had time even to answer him, he had rushed past me. But once inside the studio his excitement immediately decreased. He still looked rather angry as he asked the tall lady gazing down on him when she intended to pay a long overdue instalment on the hired typewriter, but the sight of Isadora, gradually becoming clearer to him as he grew accustomed to the dim orange light, struck him suddenly dumb. I am sure he had never seen anything like the interior of that studio before. And the woman who faced him was so exactly like the Isadora Duncan he had imagined after reading about her, that he could scarcely believe he was not dreaming. At first he stuttered. Then he listened.

“ I am,” said Isadora, in slow French, “ writing my memoirs.” She produced from her bag a crumpled contract. “ For these I am to be given a large sum of money. Out of that I will pay

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for the typewriter." She turned, pointing to the little machine that looked, standing on the floor, like a guilty black kitten. "I will pay you all as soon as they send me the money from America. I am only a poor artist, but I shall have the money. It says I shall have the money in this contract."

But now the little man would not insult Isadora by looking at the contract she flourished under his nose. He understood her perfectly, he said. He apologized for having troubled her; and all the time he was eating her up with his black beads of eyes, trying to memorize every detail of her flaming hair and tragic face. What a story to tell his friends!

"That," sighed Isadora when he had gone, "is how I spend my life now. There is in me a message that I want to give to the world. I want to go on dancing. But all I do is to persuade men like that, who must have more money than I have—because I have none—that one day I shall be able to pay them. It's enough to drive one to suicide."

"Do you ever use the typewriter?" I asked.

As I spoke the question sounded very silly,

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but I had to know how the machine came to be in that strangely beautiful place.

“Never,” said Isadora, sitting down again ; “and I suppose I never shall. But do you know, it may sound kind of odd, but I like to feel I’ve got a typewriter. Somehow it’s so safe, and solid. I think sometimes it’s the only solid thing left to me . . . But about my suicide . . .

“What really happened was this. I was sitting quite alone, feeling very miserable, when suddenly I knew that I didn’t want to go on sitting there any more. I said to myself that I just didn’t want to go on living any more ; that nobody wanted me to. Only it seemed as if somebody else, and not myself, was telling me that. Really a most curious feeling. And when I got up and went out to walk into the sea, I was quite sure that somebody was leading me very gently by the arm. I distinctly remember thinking how wonderful it was going to be, not to have any more worry, and also that none of the responsibility of ending my life would be mine, because somebody else, the somebody who had hold of my arm, was responsible. It was the strangest feeling you can imagine. I shall always think of it now when I read about

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suicide. Because I believe that all people must feel as I felt when I was walking into the water—as if somebody else had a *complete* hold over me . . .”

Again there was a knock at the door. This time, before I was able to reach it, a short dark woman burst into the studio and threw herself at Isadora's feet. For five minutes she talked so quickly, in a mixture of French, English and Italian, that I could not understand a word. She threw her arms in the air, beat her breast with her fists, wept a little, and finally embraced a totally unconcerned Isadora.

“She's mad,” said Isadora to me: “she says that it wasn't her fault that the most exaggerated account of my suicide appeared in the *Matin*.* She says it was a mistake. But I expect she got a lot of money for it. The most unlikely people make money out of me, but I never see a penny myself.”

“But I am not mad! I speak the truth. I *adore* Isadora. Monsieur . . .” And then she rushed across the room to me, and waving her arms about wildly in protestation of her inno-

* I am not certain this was the paper mentioned. If not, I apologise to the editor.

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cence, went over the whole story again, for my benefit.

Through it all, Isadora, like a child bored by the funny man at a pantomime, sat calmly on her pile of orange cushions. To any other woman this impassioned outburst must have called for surprise, even indignation. But I suppose so much had happened to Isadora during her short lifetime that it seemed very insignificant. All she said, when she managed to make her gentle voice heard between the other's loud wailing, was: "How like Emma Gramatica.* But I hope she goes soon. Because if she doesn't, I shall commit murder. And I don't want to do that. I've had enough publicity lately."

During this dramatic interlude a tall fair Englishman had crept in upon us, and now stood silently in a corner of the room. He was the Captain who had rescued Isadora from the water. Now he rescued her again by taking away to luncheon Gramatica's rival, who until the end shouted "*J'adore Isadora! Ce n'est pas vrai. Parce que j'adore Isadora!*" and Isadora and I were alone again.

It was decided that we should drive up to

* Italy's leading emotional actress.

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Saint-Paul for lunch. The good Ruthie—that American girl who had been my hostess at dinner, when I had met Isadora for the first time—had left her car for her friend. The car, like Isadora, was a little pathetic, a little battered. When Isadora came out of the shadowy studio into the crisp sunlight, she appeared lost. The soiled felt “shape” perched unhappily on her lovely head, the split fur coat that was too short for her, and the various crude colours which cried at one another about the large swathed mass of her, looked too macabre for the open air. As a girl she had been, in her own words, “a soul that has reached the light and found the whiteness ;” but as a woman she remained only beautifully grotesque. I was to learn later, from her own lips, of the circumstances which had brought about the devastating change.

Of what she said to me during that drive up into the hills, I can remember a great deal ; though the sequence of her remarks is lost. But first I remember her describing to me the kind of man the Captain was who had rescued her from the sea.

“He’s so English,” she said ; “and a man can’t be better than that. If I was asked to

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describe my idea of heaven, do you know what I'd say ? I'd say Paris—filled with Englishmen ! Because you see an Englishman does for a woman what no other man in the world will do. Take the other night. I went and knocked up the Captain at some unearthly hour—I think it was actually one o'clock in the morning, to ask him to take me to the Russian cabaret. He was asleep when I banged on the door. But within a quarter of an hour he was perfectly dressed, in every detail, and at my service. That's an Englishman. I've proved it many times in my life, in many parts of the world. If I'd knocked up a man of any other nationality, things would have been different. A Frenchman would have made such a fuss about the whole thing that it wouldn't have been worth it. An American would never have stopped telling you how noble he'd been to come with you. A German would have ignored you altogether, and a Russian would just have murdered you."

She told me, too, during that drive, of a film scenario she had written. She was very enthusiastic about it. Lately she had read somewhere of the fantastic sums paid to people who wrote for the cinema, and she was desperately

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in need of even a little money. A few days later she gave me the script to try and sell it for her. I wrote to one producer about it, but he never answered my letter. And the script, in which Isadora mentioned every detail for production, is still in the drawer of my desk. If any producer wants to see it, he had better write to me. There are plenty of thrills in it, though I'm afraid, no part for either Rin-Tin-Tin, or Tony 'the wonder horse.'

"I'd play in the film myself," said Isadora, "if they thought that would make the picture go. The vampire part, of course. Not the good woman. No public in the world would stand for me in the part of the good woman."

At luncheon, not far from us, sat a large party of singularly unattractive, but obviously rich tourists.

"Well," said Isadora, in a serious little voice, and with one wistful eye on the party: "It shows what contempt God has for money—just look at the people he gives it to." Then turning to me, she asked: "Was it Oscar Wilde who said that about money? Or have I made it up? Poor Wilde! I often wish I'd met him. But when I was in London, he was in prison. Now

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I'm in prison myself. And God alone knows when I shall be able to get out again."

"In prison? What do you mean, Isadora?"

"Well, I'm staying at the Negresco."

"The Negresco! But that's the most expensive hotel on the Riviera. I thought you hadn't any money."

"I haven't. Not a penny. That's why I'm staying there. No other hotel would have taken me in. I could not pay the rent of the room I was in, so they shut the door in my face. When I went home the other night I found myself locked out. I simply had to go to the Negresco. They know me because I used to spend hundreds of pounds there once. Though how I shall ever be able to pay them now, I don't know. Last time I got in there, when I was hard up, it took me a year to get out. I had to sell my last piece of property to do it. Only this time it's worse. I've no idea where the money is coming from. And I have to keep ordering things to make it look as if I don't have to worry about money. It's really worse than being in prison."

"But the memoirs? You'll make money by writing them?"

"Yes, there are the memoirs. That's all I've

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got left. It's a blessing I've had such an interesting life. The publishers send me a few dollars each time I let them have a thousand words. But how can anybody write in such terrible circumstances? When I read what I've written, I could cry. I did the other night. Of course, I could never be a good writer. My art is all in my dancing. But if I had time, and some place other than a hotel bedroom to write in, I could do better. Do you know, for years it has been my ambition to tell the world my life-story. Now, when I want to do it, I can't. I have to write what the publisher wants, quickly, to get a few dollars to pay my bills. If only"—and Isadora shook her red head—"if only a rich man would say to me: 'Isadora, I have a little place in the country. Go there alone, away from the world that has grown tired of you, and write your confessions.' If that happened, I believe I could give the world something as great as my dancing. A book like Rousseau's *Confessions*. But rich men don't say these things to me any more."

Isadora looked so sad that I said: "But the memoirs you are writing; I'm sure they will be very interesting."

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“ Full of clichés,” said Isadora ; “ not literature at all. I try to find new words to describe things, but I can’t. I haven’t the time. It’s the ‘ little woman in rusty black ’ every time.” She laughed. “ That’s my pet cliché. All my life she’s cropped up in badly written books— ‘ a little woman in rusty black.’ Haven’t you ever noticed her ? I’ll probably have her in my memoirs before I’ve done with them. As it is, they read as if they’d been written by Rhoda Broughton. But what can you expect ? D’Annunzio told me he would never undertake to write a book unless he could do it in his own library, surrounded by his books of reference. And he didn’t need reference books as I do. But I haven’t one ! ”

At that luncheon, also, Isadora and I discussed the question of blindness. I told her I could think of nothing so terrible as being blind ; that I would far rather be deaf.

“ No,” she cried, “ I’d rather be dead than deaf. I’m so fond of music. Without music life would be too terrible.”

“ But think of being blind,” I said.

“ That would not matter so much,” said Isadora. “ Sometimes I think the world would

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seem a more lovely place if we were all blind. I mean it," she said, seeing my astonishment. "Gordon Craig would have been a great artist anyway, but his poor sight has helped him. He sees everything through a mist, which makes things more beautiful. And if we were blind we wouldn't see each other growing older, gradually decaying. Husbands and wives would love each other longer if they couldn't see each other. One would fall in love with a beautiful voice ; and beautiful voices last longer than beautiful faces."

"Perhaps," I said, "but I'd rather be deaf."

"So would Maeterlinck, I expect," said Isadora. "To him all music is merely noise. He can't understand it. I danced for him once, and when somebody asked him what he thought of me, he said he'd seldom been so bored."

"That was rude of him."

"Yes, he's rather a rude man."

"Has Shaw ever been rude to you ?" I asked.

I was hoping that Isadora, in answer to my question, would tell me if she had really asked the great dramatist to be the father of her child. I had so often heard it said that she once wrote to Shaw saying : ' You have the greatest mind,

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I have the most beautiful body. Therefore let us produce the perfect child.' And that Shaw had replied. 'Suppose the child was born with my body and your mind!' But Isadora only said :

"No. Shaw was never rude to me. But he once cried at me, during the whole of dinner, that I was a thoroughly wicked woman; no better than a cannibal, because I enjoyed my meat. He was angry with me for enjoying the murdered food."

We drove back to the Negresco, which Isadora always thought resembled a particularly ugly sugar cake, and she said : "Come in for a moment and watch the people."

In her split fur coat—which she never would bother to have mended—she walked as slowly as a funeral procession through the smart crowd in the lounge, an object of scornful interest. Before a show-case of brilliant jewels she paused to say : "Funny thing, isn't it, that I've never cared for jewels, and never worn any—though now I wish I'd some I could pawn;" and then passed on to the entrance of the ballroom. "That," she said, nodding at the scene which met our eyes, "is what life has come to. It

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shows me what a fool I was, ever to try to bring beauty into the world ! ”

What we saw was an enormous throng of sweating tea-dancers watching an exhibition dance. A man wiped the floor with his partner, then flung her over his head, finally kissed her as they fox-trotted from the stage to bursts of applause. And immediately the floor was covered with the swaying bodies of couples melting into each other, until the floor vanished altogether, and only the great moving jelly of the packed dancers could be seen. “ Can you dance in a ball-room ? ” asked Isadora, so loudly that several people near us turned to look at the strange figure who looked down on them wistfully, and at the same time with contempt in her eyes.

“ Only rather badly,” I confessed.

“ Thank God ! ” said Isadora. “ I’ve never met a man of any intelligence who could. And this jazz music !—it’s like America laughing at me.” She turned to me suddenly. “ You’ll come to dinner to-night, won’t you ? ” she asked, and I could not understand the anxiety in her voice, “ you are coming ? ”

“ I’d love to, but I can’t. I promised a week

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ago to dine with some friends from Monte Carlo."

"But you must." The face became terribly worried; her eyes full of sadness. "Then promise me to come after dinner. Promise me, Sewell. I'll wait for you in the studio. Alone. I'm always alone now, and it makes one afraid at times. I think of such strange things."

"I'll come after dinner," I promised. "But, Isadora, where is Mitri?"

"He's left me," she whispered. "No, not for ever, as most of them have done," she added. "Mitri would not leave me. I'm *sure* he wouldn't. He's gone to Paris. He said it was so terrible being here without any money."

"That's why he went?"

"Oh no; I don't think so. He said when he arrived in Paris, he'd do all he could to help save my house there. They want to sell it up. But Mitri won't let them."

As Isadora spoke, I had a vision of the young Russian musician I had seen with her a few days before, struggling against the men who claimed her house. In my imagination he cut a poor little figure.

"He's such a sweet musician," she said, reading my thoughts; "but I'm afraid he'll make a

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poor fighter. I wanted to go with him. But I can't leave this hotel until I pay the bill." She whispered these words that they might escape the tall commissioner standing near us. "Then," she said more loudly, "you'll come to the studio ?"

"I'd love to."

"Thank you so much. I'll dance for you, if you like."

I tried to express my gratitude. But already she had turned away from me, had begun to ascend the stairs. As she went, she hummed to herself: "I wonder if my baby does the Charleston."

It was a sample of one of the popular American dance tunes she disliked so intensely, yet all the time we were in Nice together she would keep humming it. She would say, after the orchestra, at her request, had played Beethoven :

"How can anybody listen to modern music after that ?" And the next minute she would be staring into space, humming : "*I wonder if my baby does the Charleston.*"

III

I WENT that evening after dinner to see Isadora dance. It is one of the evenings in my life that I shall never forget. That private performance of hers, and one she gave a week later in her studio—which I shall presently describe—were the last before her final public performance at the Mogador Theatre in Paris. I have chosen to describe the second occasion on which I watched her, because it was so poignantly dramatic. It was after she had danced for me the first time that she revealed to me as she lay exhausted on the cushions her real feeling about the country of her birth.

“Why did you tell me this afternoon,” I asked, “that the music at the Negresco was like America laughing at you? Don’t you like America?”

“America doesn’t like me,” she said, suddenly sitting up and stretching out her arms. “Not middle-aged America

“But I think young America would love me—

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if it dared. Just as it loves Walt Whitman." She asked me for a cigarette. When she had lighted it, she went on: "Almost the last time I danced in my own country I had the orchestra play the *Internationale*. It was in Boston, at the Symphony Hall. I wore a little red frock that seemed to shock some of the puritans. I went in front of the footlights and waved a red scarf. And as I waved it, I cried to my audience:

" 'This is red. That is what I am . . . Americans are wild. Don't let them tame you. I don't let them tame me.' I meant when I said that, that red was my colour. That red expressed the inspiration of my art, my vitality. But nobody understood that I wasn't just a common anarchist trying to stir up trouble. One paper the next morning said I 'looked pink, talked red and acted scarlet.' Can you wonder that I finished with America? Or that America finished with me. I understood the youthful spirit of my country, but my country is afraid to let me interpret it. I always did and said the wrong thing in America." Isadora sighed. "I'm not like Mary Garden. She always says what's wanted. When Mary Garden arrives in New York, and the reporters ask her what she thinks

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of Prohibition, she says, 'I think it's a splendid thing for the country.' But when they ask me, I tell them I think it's all damned nonsense, and the ruin of the people. Of course I'm a fool. People always hate one for saying what one really thinks. But somehow I can't help it. I haven't Mary Garden's tact. I ought to say I think prohibition is wonderful. After that it wouldn't matter if I got as drunk as sixteen owls. So long as I'd *said* it . . ."

On the evening when Isadora had promised to dance for me again, I sat with her in the corner of a little Alsatian café, that we used often to go to, about midnight, for something to eat. Also at the table that night was G—— (with whom Isadora was always much in sympathy) and two young journalists, one English and the other American, who were working on the *Tribune*.

Nobody, to see Isadora as she sat in her corner that evening, hunched up in her fur coat, her hair rather wildly disordered and the handle of a pewter beer-mug clasped tightly in one hand, could have recognized in her the Isadora Duncan who had inspired, with the sight of her simple beauty, all the great artists of her time. Of simplicity she now lacked everything. She

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seemed that evening to be the symbol of her own tragedies. In her face seemed reflected the agony she had endured—the loss of her two beautiful children through drowning ; the loss of her young Russian husband who hanged himself ; all the suffering she experienced whenever she allowed herself to think of the difficulty she was having to get back to the stage—and when she asked the waiter for a second tankard of beer, her gesture indicated that she would drown her sorrow at the cost of a few francs. It was painful to be with her then. One felt so utterly incapable of helping her. And when a bar-lounger, who seemed to think he had the right to claim her acquaintance, told her a risky story, I wanted very much to knock him down.

“Don’t bother,” advised Isadora, for whom stories of that kind simply did not exist ; “I smiled, but I haven’t the least idea what the man was talking about. If you knock him down we shall all be in to-morrow’s papers. And, really, I think there has been quite enough about me in the papers lately. Suppose, when we’ve finished our beer, we all go along to the studio. I’ll dance for you.”

This suggestion was immediately taken up,

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especially by the two young journalists, who begged Isadora to wait for them, as they had first to return to their office. So it was decided that Isadora, the artist and myself should go on to the studio and wait there for the other two. They promised to be at the studio within half an hour.

This arrangement seemed perfectly satisfactory. Nothing could have given me greater pleasure than the prospect of seeing Isadora dance again. But just as the party broke up, one of the journalists, whom I had never met before that evening, grinning at me, asked : " Will she really do it ? "

All the way to the studio, jogging along the three miles of the promenade, I could still see the white grinning face of that little journalist. It followed me through the darkness, and repeated its sarcastic question. I was suddenly sick with fear. For all at once the full significance of the question, the morbid interest of its intonation, was brought home to me. " He is only coming," I said to myself, " to see if Isadora can still dance. He doesn't believe she can. Nobody who hasn't seen her in the studio would believe she was capable any longer. But he'll

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change his silly little mind when he sees her.” Then there came to me, with all the horror of a fresh shock, the belief that nothing Isadora could do would change that cheap mind of his. He had seen her a few minutes before, a battered mound of a woman in a shabby fur coat, who appeared the least likely person in the world to be able to dance. To him, for all the greatness of her artistry, she would remain a battered, rather stout woman. He would laugh at Isadora’s dance because he would not be able to understand it.

I have realized since that these thoughts of mine were unfair both to the young journalist, and to Isadora. But I am not sure that at the time something of the same kind was not passing through Isadora’s mind. As I glanced at her in the open cab she was looking at the moon. Her head was raised in an attitude she used often to assume—sometimes, I thought, to take away the effect of her double chin—and she seemed to have forgotten that she still belonged to the earth. Once we were inside the studio, though, she seemed to be a little uncertain of herself.

“I wonder,” she said, “If I ought to have promised to dance.” She added, I thought to

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cover her real meaning : " It's so cold in this place and of course I couldn't dance with shoes on."

It was cold in the studio. The small oil-stove was at the best of times inadequate for the size of the room, and now it was not even lighted. More often than not that stove remained unlit. Josephine, the old servant, was supposed to look in from time to time and light it, to warm the room and keep the damp out. But even Josephine, for all that she looked like one of the witches in Macbeth, could not keep a stove alight when nobody gave her money to buy oil.

Nobody who did not know how poor Isadora was, believed that even a fire was denied her. One could not blame them. People have a strange idea that women who have been as fantastically rich as Isadora had once been, will never want. They believe that if they do, then it is their own fault. Which, of course, it is. Assuming that it is ever a fault in a genius to be careless about finance, which I doubt. But then Isadora was staying at the most expensive hotel in Nice at this time, and who was to know that she stayed there only because she was too poor to stay anywhere else. Even while she shivered in her green fireless studio, a New York paper

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said: "Miss Duncan lives in a studio on the Riviera. It is an immense room, hung with purple velvet; there are no chairs but red couches, forming a sloping amphitheatre around a stage on which incense burns all day in tall tripods." A public fed with such information may be forgiven for imagining a Cleopatra-like siren reclining with her infatuated lovers. It is not to be expected of them that they should realize instead the actual scene—Isadora, greatest of living dancers, shivering; and, watching her sadly beautiful performance, four half-baked youths in overcoats.

"Please dance," said the young artist.

"I'd love to dance for you and Sewell." Isadora smiled, very wistfully, and looked in the faint light of the lamps more like a white chrysanthemum than a full-blown peony. "But the others. They'll be along any minute, and they may not understand. You both love my dancing. But perhaps they won't like it at all."

"They'll love it. Nobody could help loving it," I encouraged her, with, I am afraid, little conviction in my voice. I wondered why I was asking her to dance, when all the time I felt so afraid of what might happen if she did.

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“Maeterlinck didn’t love it,” she said again; “I only bored him. But then he didn’t even like music. And his wife told me afterwards that he really liked cruder women . . . I suppose I wasn’t crude enough—then.”

Isadora went behind a tiny screen and changed into a flimsy wisp of a dress that looked like frozen smoke.

“It does look a little dirty rag of a thing,” she admitted to us afterwards. “It hasn’t been washed since I first wore it—twenty-five years ago.”

I remember looking with a feeling of awe at the wisp of stuff, which, made before I had been born, had travelled over two continents with Isadora. When she told us she had worn it at most of her great dances I tried to think of all the eyes that had gazed on it, on first the young girl, then on the woman who had worn it—the enthusiastic eyes of all the nations of the earth—and as my mind came back to less imaginative conceptions the dress appeared, as did Isadora herself at that moment, such an unlikely centre of universal idolisation. They both seemed so in need of sympathy.

The next thing I remember was feeling angry

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with myself for having, as a child, neglected to take my music lessons seriously.

"Can nobody play for me?" said Isadora. And following her question I heard my mother's voice, saying to me out of the past: "One day you'll be sorry you didn't listen to me. You'll be sorry you gave up your music."

That day, so little dreamed of by me then, had come. I was sorry. I would have sacrificed almost anything now for the privilege of being able to play the piano while Isadora danced. I blamed myself for a fool, as young men seldom do.

"Very well," said Isadora, rather hopelessly, "I'll have to use the gramophone. The Wagner records aren't good. The needle is terrible. But I must do the best I can. I rather wish now that I hadn't promised to dance. I hope those two boys, when they come, will be nice about me."

She was sitting now on a pile of cushions, the old fur coat over her shoulders to keep her warm, trying to redden her lips in a mildew-spotted mirror.

"It is an old coat— isn't it?" she smiled, as I put it more closely round her. "I've a better one in Paris, that reaches to my feet, and has a

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huge collar, but it's in pawn now. This was a better coat once, but it's been cut, and patched. And once this poor old coat"—she stroked it fondly down one sleeve—"caused a terrible fight. In the middle of a rehearsal one morning—I was in a Russian town then—the stage hands, who were communists, went on strike. They all left their jobs and refused to work—for a woman who *danced* while they *starved*; a woman who went about in rich furs, while they had to suffer the cold. Rich furs! and I was wearing this poor old coat. I stood up in the middle of the stage, and tried to make them understand that I wasn't the rich woman they thought. But that only made things worse. Then the orchestra, who knew I'd given all my money to my school to teach Russian children beauty, took my part. They rushed up on to the stage, and a free fight started. There was a terrible commotion. Musical instruments were broken. Blood ran down the men's faces. All because of this poor wretched coat. In the end though, the dear communists were so sorry for the mistake they'd made, that they organized a collection for me among their comrades, and bought me the lovely coat that's now pawned in Paris.

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It was exhibited in the window of the principal street of the town the week before they presented it to me. ‘The coat that is to be given to Isadora Duncan in gratitude.’ Hundreds of Russian peasants stood in the snow looking at it . . . I think that was the greatest compliment I ever had paid to me in my life.

“No! Not the greatest . . .”

Whenever she talked of Russia, I noticed Isadora remembered numerous incidents. Her mind seemed to dwell on her experiences in Russia more easily than on those she had had in other countries.

“Once,” she said, “I arrived in a Russian town in the early morning, just as the dawn was breaking over the cold streets. The snow was thick on the ground—it was much colder than it is in this studio at the moment—and I saw a long line of poor huddled figures waiting on the pavement outside a large stone building. When I asked a policeman who they were, and what they were doing, he told me they were the people waiting to see Isadora Duncan dance that night. Now wasn’t that a *great* compliment! No compliments paid me by men—not even by men I’ve known like D’Annunzio, or

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Rodin, or Hækel—have meant as much to me as that silent crowd waiting in the snow.”

A lesser woman than Isadora would have recited that experience in a voice calculated to make it sound impressive. But it was told in that simple manner that was always hers, which indicated that really nothing remarkable had happened. Isadora had the simplicity of all great people, though to look at her one might easily have doubted it.

When the two journalists arrived she advised them to keep their coats on as it was so cold. Then she bent down to wind up the gramophone. None of us dared to do this for fear of breaking it. After that she threw a sheet over her shoulders, draping it about herself quickly, and went and stood before the dark curtains at the opposite side of the room. She reminded me of a white Madonna against a dark, olive green sky, except that no Madonna, even in the gaudy shrines of Italy, ever had quite such carelessly carmined lips. Her bare feet on the darkness of the carpet were like the little white doves of Wilde's *Salomé*.

I know so little about music that now I have no idea from which opera of Wagner's that

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record was made. But the solemn tune, sounding in that great room like the lost lament of a dying prima donna, did not seem to matter much. Nothing mattered, when Isadora danced, except her dance. She herself did not matter. One forgot, watching her move very slowly, that she was there at all. She drove out of the mind, with one slight movement of her foot, or of her hand, the impression one had had a short time before of a large red-headed woman drinking lager beer. Her largeness, with everything else about her, disappeared. In its place was a spiritual vitality that defied the body it animated. Her dance, one felt, had been in that room since the beginning of time. It would be there until the end of time ; a beautiful vibration that was eternally avoiding imprisonment. But somehow Isadora's body, for the few minutes when she moved it to the music, had captured that vibration. Through the medium of herself it was materialized.

When the record was finished, and the needle made a grating noise on the paper centre of the disc, nobody made any effort to go and stop the machine. We all sat very silent, as if for some reason we were ashamed of ourselves.

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Isadora went on dancing. As the music ceased, I had the feeling one experiences watching a film when the music in a kinema suddenly stops ; and the next thing I realized was that the music had seemed to be of no importance. At the end of her dance Isadora walked slowly towards us and sat down where we made room for her. She was the first to speak. As the sound of her American voice broke the spell she had created, somebody rushed over to turn off the gramophone.

“Last time I did that dance,” she said—and she was moved, I could tell, by the contrast she drew—“I did it in Russia, on a hill, to music played by a gigantic orchestra. Thousands of people sat round me in a circle, some of them on the roof-tops, even on church steeples, and in the branches of trees, so that everybody might see me, battleships of the Russian fleet threw their most powerful searchlights on me I’ll do one more dance for you,” she added, standing up suddenly. “For this dance I shan’t need any music.”

Her last dance, the last dance I ever saw her perform, would scarcely be judged a dance by ordinary standards. A *diseuse* with no know-

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ledge of dancing could have accomplished it ; but only a *disease* with the powers of Ruth Draper. Isadora stood at one end of the studio, a motionless white figure clutching her draperies. Very slowly—so slowly, in fact, that one scarcely saw her move—she made her way across the room, from time to time glancing fearfully behind her at the imagined shadow of death. Gradually the shadow, which one could almost believe one saw—so great was the power of her acting—advanced upon her, until at the end she remained standing perfectly upright, frozen in its grip.

That was almost Isadora's last dance. A few months later death came to her, not less dramatically, only a few yards away from where she stood that evening when she was only pretending. I do not know what her final performance at the Mogador in Paris was like. A famous journalist, writing of her after her death, said of Isadora : " When I was in Paris a few weeks ago I nearly called on her. ' Don't go,' I was told. ' She tried to dance last week. It was awful. She stood on the stage and scarcely moved. You would have cried had you been there.' "

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That was what the journalist had been told—that “she scarcely moved”. And perhaps that is what most people, used to the Russian ballet, would have said of her performance in the studio. Yet I cannot think that it needed a very great intelligence to appreciate the extraordinary beauty of her work.

Pavlova, at about that time, was telling the people in Berlin of the greatness of Isadora Duncan. Diaghileff was her friend. But though she loved the members of the ballet personally, Isadora could not watch them dance. When I suggested one night that we should go over to Monte Carlo to see *The Triumph of Neptune*, which was being presented there for the first time, she said :

“No, I don’t care much for acrobats.”

For some moments after her dance in the studio was finished, Isadora remained standing. She was as motionless as a statue, except that tears glistened in her staring eyes, and one rolled slowly down her cheek. We all sat watching her as if some hypnotic influence had drawn our eyes to the white column of her body ; then, without any warning G—— did something, which, though it sounds incredible, was not more

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theatrical than the rest of the evening had been. His action was spontaneous and simple. He got up from his seat, went over to her, and, kneeling, bent his head to kiss the hem of the sheet she had thrown round herself. His adoration of her art was unmistakable. It shone in his eyes as he looked up at her. We all adored her, and felt grateful for what we had seen, but only G—— seemed able to express that gratitude. That his action pleased Isadora, there was no doubt. It may have been a very small bouquet, but its sincerity brought her to life. She helped him to his feet, and kissed him, and they walked back to us clasping each others arms.

“Why,” we all asked Isadora, when she sat down among us and wrapped herself again in the fur coat, “have you left the stage? You should be dancing always.”

I do not mean that we all cried these words at her at the same time, but that was the sense of what we each said to her during the next ten minutes.

“I want to dance,” she said, throwing out her arms to the ceiling in that characteristic gesture of hers—“I want to dance to the world,

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but I have no money. And nowadays, art that has no money behind it is never heard of. Once a millionaire loved me. Now nobody does. So how am I to get back to the stage ? ” Her arms fell to her sides, hopelessly. “ Do you know,” she said, “ that Duse, the greatest actress in the world, even after she had been acclaimed the greatest actress, was away from the stage for fifteen years. Duse was a proud woman, too proud to ask anybody to give her money, and so she just lived quietly while most of her public began to forget her. She lived so quietly that in Florence one day, she had not enough to eat. I was staying with her and we went together to sell some jewels to buy the dinner. Few people knew that about Duse. Few people know anything about artists except when they’re enjoying their triumphs. They never hear of the gaps between . . .

“ Can’t one of you,” said Isadora with a pitiful smile, “ find me another millionaire ? Every famous actress on the stage to-day is supported by a man who has made so much money out of automobiles, or soap, or pickles, that he has enough left over to spend on art. Last year I was in a restaurant in Paris where several

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great artists"—Isadora always used the word artist in its wider sense—"came to dine, and as each one walked into the room I was able to fix a label to her. Cigarettes, buttons, perfume; all the trades were represented, but I was just myself. Isn't that a terrible state of affairs?

"If only," went on Isadora, "I could have my school again. My school for making children grow up beautifully. Some government should give me the money, because my work is as important as any other. More important. What is of greater importance than teaching boys and girls to grow up with beautiful bodies, and beautiful minds? Nothing! Why, it's as important as any new invention. The State gives its inventors places to work in, and the means to work with. Edison has his laboratory. I have only this little studio, and any day that may be taken away from me. When I had money I used to adopt the children of poor parents and teach them. I helped their bodies to beauty by making them dance the air and the sea, and the sky, and the breeze. Their minds grew beautiful with their bodies . . . Once I had a thousand children dancing at the same time. I stood on a great platform above them. And as I made a

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movement all the children copied it together. It was wonderful. I was happy then . . .”

Poor Isadora. She often talked like that. For really in her heart, she wanted her school again. She wanted her children round her, to teach the ideals of beauty to.

“It’s so terrible,” she cried to me one day, “to think that God has given me the secret of beauty, which He gives to so few of us, and yet I’ve no longer the power to give it to the world. It’s all there, inside me; there, there”—she pointed to her breast ecstatically—“waiting to come out . . . But now there’s nobody left to listen to me.” She stood up after crying out those words, I remember, and said more calmly: “It’s from there that everything comes to me; that is the centre of all my expression.” And once again she put her hand on her breast. “It took me a long time to discover that,” she said; “I spent weeks as a girl trying to make the discovery. In the end I succeeded. For hours together I used to stand quite still in the middle of the room, with my eyes closed, trying to realize the centre of my emotions. My mother used to tell me that my dinner was getting cold, that I’d be wiser to eat it up before anybody else

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did, but I used to wave her away. I stood like this"—Isadora then stood very stiffly and closed her eyes—"and suddenly I'd raise my arm from my side, or one leg, without thinking about it, very quickly. For I knew that my movements were never directed by the mind. None of the movements of my dances have ever come from my mind. They all come from there, start from there," she said, tapping her breast. "That is my secret—the secret of my art, that it took me several years to discover. Once I'd made that discovery it wasn't difficult for me to startle the world with my dancing. My inspiration came from a unique source.

"When I first danced in London," Isadora told us in the studio that night, "Ellen Terry sprang to her feet and exclaimed to the audience: 'Do you realize what you are looking at? Do you understand that this is the most incomparably beautiful dancing in the world? Do you appreciate what this woman is doing for you—bringing back the beauty of the old world of art?' My dancing brought me admiration from all over Europe and America. And for me it was so simple. So long as I remembered that the centre of my being, the directing force of my

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life, was in my breast, I danced on sheer inspiration."

Art, her conception of the beauty of the world, was all that made Isadora happy. The rest of her—those actions of hers that made her personality appear so complex—was merely a desperate revolt against the deafness of the world to her ideals. She was the last person to deny that she liked good wine, even cocktails. But there had been a time before the death of her two beautiful children, when plain orange juice pleased her more. Once she saw me with a glass of plain water. Looking at it wistfully, she said: "What a *strange* drink!" and took up a glass of whisky, with the remark that her drink would have done me more good. But knowing her supreme love of art, and the pain that the ugliness of the world—its streets, its factories, and its jazz—caused her, I will not believe that she ever drank anything alcoholic except in a spirit of defiant despair. With each drink she took she seemed to say to the world, what she said to me one night at a café: "I am hounded and tortured. I talk to the world of my art, but they are only interested in my body. And what does my body matter? Nothing! I

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would sell it without a thought. But I could not sell my art, my ideals. It's a crazed century that can only find interest in me as a female Casanova. But what does it matter?"

It mattered very much to Isadora. So much, that in desperation she would at times do foolish things to try to drown the thought of it.

I think it was the little journalist who, as we left the studio that night, said to Isadora: "You are the only genius I have ever met."

"I used to believe," Isadora answered him, "that anybody who showed signs of genius should be encouraged. I used to look on genius because of its rarity, as something precious, to be guarded. I believed that a child who had genius should be specially well cared for . . ." Then Isadora laughed—and it hurt one to hear her laugh like that—before she continued: "But of course I was wrong; perfectly absurd. Now I am wiser. I know the world. I know the world so well, that I'd say to anybody who asked me what was the best thing to do with a child who showed signs of genius: 'Shoot it!' Really, I would, I'd stand children of genius up against a wall and shoot them all. It would be the kindest thing to do. Then they would

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never know what an unhappy place this world can be for those whose thoughts are not the thoughts of the majority. I *do* know. And I'd like to spare anybody the suffering."

Those words were not said for their dramatic effect. Isadora meant them, as she meant everything she said. She did nothing for effect. Her life might have been easier for her if she had. But her total disregard for what others thought of her, prevented her from finding favour with any but the few who understood her true greatness. Her regret at her inability to raise funds for re-starting her school was not the regret of a fallen star who shakes her fist at the world that has grown tired of her waning powers. She had no craving for automobiles and expensive mansions; and always she disliked jewels. Even her desire to get back to the stage was a secondary one. She wanted to make money only in order to finance her school. "I'd like a little car," she said, "and somewhere comfortable to sleep; but nothing more." She had been born into the world with a conception of beauty in her that she wanted to give to the world. Tragedies came to her, in almost every shape, endeavouring to warp her mind from its

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original ideal; but to the end she remained a disciple of beauty.

While the others went on home, at about four o'clock that morning, still intoxicated with the beauty of the performance they had watched, Isadora insisted that G—— and I should go with her up to her room at the Negresco.

“Don't bother what the staff thinks,” she said, as we passed, in the now almost deserted lounge, one or two sleepy-looking night porters. “They'll think the worst of me anyway. Everybody does that.”

When we reached her room on the third floor she asked us in to have a drink. We sat for about a quarter of an hour chatting over glasses of brandy. Then G—— went out of the room for a few moments, and while he was gone, Isadora asked me suddenly, with great intensity :

“Do you think Mitri loves me? Do you think he's really trying to save my house in Paris?”

I don't think I showed the surprise I felt at this sudden question, as I replied :

“I'm sure he loves you. Of course. He'll write to you soon.”

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“I’m so pleased,” smiled Isadora. At once her face cleared. “I know Mitri loves me really; only when people go away and never write—one thinks such absurd things.”

IV

SPREAD over two continents are thousands of people whose conceptions of Isadora must be different. To the majority, probably—members of the vast audiences that applauded her in all the big cities of Europe and America—the name Isadora Duncan brings the memory of a stage-lit figure standing out from the darkness of those curtains of hers that finally, hanging at half-length, lined the walls of the studio at Nice. To those who knew her personally, any number of different environments might suggest themselves ; but to me she will always appear, first, as I so often saw her in the untidy bedroom on the third floor of the Hotel Negresco. I can always see her moving about it with a majesty that demanded more space ; a large gay-plumed bird in a cage. A bird too tired, and too wise to flap its wings against the bars in any fruitless effort to gain freedom.

The room at the Negresco — which was probably not paid for at the time of her death—

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was like an actress's dressing-room, after she had invested it with her flowing personality. I always had the impression when she left it that she was going to make her appearance on the stage. It had the makeshift qualities of a temporary place, and it was difficult to realise that at the time it was Isadora's only home. The furniture was pale grey and gold, like the bedroom suites in musical comedy. Out of some of the drawers hung tails of coloured clothing. A trunk stood half-open on the floor. The bed became a divan during the day, and was invariably littered with newspapers. On a table near the window, were piled up books of press-cuttings which Isadora was looking into to help her with her memoirs. On her dressing-table, propped against a bottle of perfume, was a large photograph of Mitri looking happy in a brilliant pull-over; and tucked into the corner of the mirror, in true theatrical style, a snap-shot of Gordon Craig as a young man in a white linen suit. Even during the day the room was lit by artificial light. Isadora had ceased to appreciate the sun.

In the overcrowded room, or in her studio, I saw Isadora every day. She did not like being

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left alone with her sad thoughts, and when I could not be with her, because I had work to do, G—— went instead. Sometimes, I am not certain why, we both felt very tired. Even if one had spent a whole day just listening to Isadora, one felt tired afterwards. The magnetism of her personality, which was very considerable, sapped one's own vitality. Then she was more than ever like the full blown peony she had reminded me of at our first meeting; a peony thirsting to express itself before the last petals fell.

“I love young men,” she said to me one evening at the Café de Paris, “they are my weakness. And I am very weak. Weakness, and week-ending—that has always been my trouble. But what does it matter?” And she took up her glass of wine and was happy, because just at that moment the orchestra played Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*. “Written a hundred years ago,” she said, “and as fresh and beautiful to-day as it ever was. What memories the playing of that piece brings back to me . . .”

She told me, when the music was over, and we could talk while they played an American dance tune, of her young men.

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"My ideals killed the great love that three men have had for me," she said. "But then all three of them were jealous men. And when a man's jealous he's not normal. Apart from those three loves of my life—*three* mind you, though the newspapers like to credit me with a *hundred and three*—I have loved other people. But they were just"—Isadora tried to find the word—"well—little adventures."

Meeting Isadora on her own frank footing—and I believe any regard she may have had for me was on account of my rather mannerless frankness—I said :

"Isadora, a famous musical critic said to me, long before we met : 'Isadora Duncan is a great dancer, my good Sewell—but she has ruined the life of every young man she has liked.'"

"He said that ?" At first Isadora looked a little surprised. Then she smiled. "Well, I'm sure a lot of people believe it. I don't think it's true. I know, just as you know, that it isn't, but if it amuses them . . ."

"If it amuses them" I agreed.

"I expect—I *know*," said Isadora, "that the people dining all round us are thinking what a

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curious, wicked kind of creature I am. And you," she smiled at me, like a mischievous child—for Isadora could look very like a mischievous child at times—"I expect they think you're my latest young man, 'How terrible!' they're saying"—and Isadora imitated perfectly the expression of a very shocked old lady—" 'How terrible—that old woman, with such a *young* boy. Why, my dear, she's old enough to be his mother. You don't know who she is? My dear, it's Isadora Duncan. Yes, that terrible dancer woman . . . My dear, don't you *remember* . . . ?' "

Dear Isadora! How well she did it. And she was a better actress than one would have thought, because, used as she was to that kind of idle gossip going on all round her, she never ceased to feel sensitive about it. All her joking and laughter at her own expense was a kind of courage on her part; she used it to protect herself.

And what she said was true. The diners at the Café de Paris, most of them bourgeois people out to enjoy the evening, did talk to each other like that. They enjoyed us—once they had learned from their waiter who we were—as much

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as they enjoyed the food. At first, I noticed, they smiled, scornfully, as Isadora and myself came into the restaurant. They nudged each other, called each other's attention to the flame-headed woman in purple draperies with two such very English-looking young men. They did not, one saw from their expressions, think much of those young men. When any of our glances met theirs, they endeavoured, with little success, to appear disinterested. But they were curious. Curious enough to enquire our names when they observed—as they could not help doing—the deference with which all the waiters in the place treated that strange flame-headed woman. It was usually after the leader of the orchestra, with his violin tucked under his arm, and a smile of humility on his nice face, had come to learn if there was anything Isadora would like played, that the diners could contain themselves no longer, and enquired our names. And on learning that they beheld the one and only Isadora Duncan, many of them I am sure, felt, as they paid their bills, that they had had their money's worth.

The only satisfaction I managed to get out of these people, all of whom I resented for the

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contempt which I felt instinctively they had for Isadora, came to me on the evening of a day on which the local paper printed a front page article headed : " Cosimo Wagner and a Dancer." In this article was described, at some length, the long-ago meeting between Wagner's widow and Isadora. On that occasion Isadora had danced (in Berlin, I think it was, though I am not at all certain) to the dance-music which Wagner had written for one of his operas. She danced, as always, in her own inspired way, which was unlike that of any of the other dancers who had interpreted the same work ; and Wagner's widow had been shocked. She had stood up and told the audience that it was all wrong, that her husband had never conceived such a dance. But some days later Cosimo Wagner had come with apologies to Isadora. In the meantime she had found among her late husband's papers detailed instructions for the execution of the dance in question, and these, in almost every detail, agreed with the performance Isadora had given.

" If I had been a man I might have done for dancing what Wagner did for music," was Isadora's comment when she read the paper.

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“But I haven’t his *power*. No woman has. That is why no woman can, or ever will be able to play the piano really well. None of them have the strength. When they play, it sounds like a sweet little cat walking over the keys.”

Having read the article in the paper, the musicians at the café played Wagner that evening; which prevented many toes from tapping out jazz tunes. For once the diners had to listen to real music. And because of Isadora. Their suffering—for they suffered Wagner, where they would have adored “*No No Nanette*,”—pleased me enormously. But Isadora, when I pointed this out to her, was quite indifferent. She told me not to be vindictive. After which counsel I felt rather ashamed.

How very wrong those people dining in the café were to think of Isadora as a woman who would ruin a young man’s life, they will never know. But they were quite wrong. I can think of nothing more childishly stupid than whitewashing a person’s character when they are dead, and on that point Isadora agreed with me absolutely. She never defended herself against a great deal of abuse that was hurled at her. But as it happens, in her particular

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case, this lack of defence was merely the outcome of her disregard for what anybody said about her. She simply would not be dictated to, except by her conscience. And her conscience, except on two occasions in her life—which I shall mention later—never told her that she had done wrong.

Listening to Isadora's intimate life story, very little of which appears in the memoirs she was writing at the time when I was seeing her every day, I realized how all women who are as famous as she was, are misjudged by a world who know really nothing about them.

The young men for whom, at one time or another, Isadora had an affection—that there were several, she was never so foolish as to deny—all benefitted from her affection. The artists among them she helped to success by her inspiration ; others she supported more materially. But none of them showed her any gratitude. All of them left. Not one came back to help her when she needed help, badly.

“ I would like to go down in history as a great dancer,” Isadora said one afternoon, wandering round her studio sadly ; “ but I suppose I shall be remembered only by the number of lovers I

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have had—which will be much exaggerated. And because I'm a woman, they will say that I treated all my lovers badly. Cast them off, like—what is the word you writers use ? ” she asked, turning to me.

“ ‘Soiled gloves’ is the cliché,” I told her.

“That's it—like soiled gloves. But in my life I've found it has always been the other way about. Funny isn't it ? I've always been cast off. Artists I helped, when they became famous, forgot all about me. Other people, as soon as my income dropped, dropped me. Still, that's just life.” She smiled again. “I suppose it's time I knew my world. But I don't expect I ever shall. I trust in other people, you know ; believe in them. It's silly of me, yet I go on doing it.

“And,” Isadora went on, “some women are so odd—so terribly unfair to other women. Now I'll tell you something, just to show you what I mean. Once, in Germany, I met a boy called J——. He was very sweet—apart from the fact that he fell very much in love with me. He wrote me lots and lots of letters, which I'll show you if you're interested, and he used often to come and see me. He had come to Europe

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to study singing. Poor darling, he hadn't any voice at all, really—no voice worth training—but he was very good-looking, and he'd persuaded a very rich, middle-aged woman, who'd found him as a bottle-washer in a little restaurant in New York, that he would be a second Caruso. Of course, the American woman was keeping him. She made him an allowance, and I'm sure she was very much in love with him. She wrote to him, and he wrote to her, telling her all his news. In one letter he mentioned me. And at the sound of my name the American woman simply went mad! She cabled poor J—— to come back to New York immediately if he ever wanted to receive another penny from her, and said such untrue things about me that I was really shocked. Can you," said Isadora, shaking her head, "*understand* a woman being so unreasonable? Poor J——, frightened out of his little life, got the first boat he could. I didn't see him again. But he wrote me once or twice from America."

"What," I asked Isadora, "is J—— doing now?"

"He was killed in the war, I think," she said. "Poor J——."

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“ And the rich American woman ? ”

“ She went on finding lots of new lovers. You see, she was the kind of rich woman I am supposed to be. I’m not rich any longer, but my reputation, which has been invented by all the large newspapers in America ever since I can remember, goes on——. Poor J——. Do you know, that boy had the nicest, jolliest laugh I’ve ever heard . . . ”

Isadora began to weep.

* * * * *

I found Isadora, on another occasion, sitting in an armchair in her room, crying. She was crying very softly. On her lap she nursed a grey tweed overcoat. Mitri had left it behind him when he went to Paris.

As I came into the room she looked at me very sadly :

“ It’s Mitri’s overcoat,” she said, “ he hasn’t written to me, I’m so lonely without him. But I can’t go to Paris. They’d never let me leave this hotel without paying the bill, and I can’t possibly do that. The bill keeps mounting up. I keep writing memoirs. The publishers don’t advance me enough money. What am I to do ?

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And on top of it all I believe Mitri doesn't love me any longer . . ."

She began to weep again, very softly.

"Isadora, don't be silly. Of course Mitri loves you."

At that moment I could have killed Mitri. I doubted very much if he would write. I knew really nothing about him, except that he had the power to make Isadora very happy or unhappy. But my words, the first that came into my head, apparently helped Isadora. And I went on :

"How can you expect him to write? He's in Paris, trying to raise the money to save your house. As soon as he has good news he will write."

At that she began to dry her eyes with the rough sleeve of Mitri's overcoat.

"I'm sure you're right," she said. "It's selfish of me. It's unfair to poor Mitri, too."

"Very unfair," I said, to push home the point, and after that she became more herself.

"Just look at the state this room is in," she said. "Once I had dozens of servants. Now I have to clear up everything myself."

As she stood up, and surveyed the litter in the room despairingly, I noticed that for the

first time since I had known her she was wearing a completely real, and very lovely dress. Before it would have been difficult to describe her clothes—they seemed always to be just vague and floating—but now she wore a sheath-like affair of some pale gauzy material, on the borders of which was painted many times over, the severed head of John the Baptist.

“I put this on,” she said, as I stared at it, “to look nice when the man from the newspaper comes. Will you help me get the room tidy? I had started, when suddenly I thought about Mitri; and that upset me.”

As I began picking up various papers from the floor, I asked her:

“But who is the newspaper man? What’s he coming here for?”

“I’ve forgotten what paper he’s from. But he rang up to ask about my house being saved in Paris. That’s what started me thinking about Mitri. I told him he ought to make an appeal for me in his paper. He said he would do what he could. So I asked him to come along and see me.”

We both heard the sound of a piece of paper being pushed under the door into the little

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passage that ran between the bedroom and the bathroom. I went to see what it was; and picked up an envelope from the mat. When I returned to give it to Isadora, she was placing photographs of men all over the dressing-table.

"It's only the bill," she said, glancing at the envelope in my hand. "I don't know how I'm going to pay it. But I'll order an expensive supper to be served in my room this evening—which you shall share with me—and then they'll think I'm rich."

This seemed to me to be a very unwise plan. But I said nothing. I only asked what she was doing with the pictures of so many handsome young men. She looked at me very slyly.

"These are Isadora Duncan's lovers! The newspapers expect them, so I'm putting them all out ready. That's poor J——," she added, pointing to one of them. "And that's . . . I've forgotten his name. We never loved each other at all; but the Press won't know that! And in that top cupboard—" she pointed across with a majestic sweep of her lovely arm—"behind the brown hat, you'll find a half bottle of whisky. That's the thing all newspaper men expect. If

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I give the man a drink, and a glimpse of my young men ; yourself as a live example ; I think he ought to be satisfied."

When he came, I think the newspaper man was satisfied. He was small, but tried to appear important. Obviously he felt ill at ease in that bizarre room. He imagined, though, that he was very much a man of the world, as, with the air of one who wanted to give the impression that he had as a young man slapped Lily Langtry on the back, he took up his glass.

"To your health, Miss Duncan."

"My health is all right," sighed Isadora. "It's money that I want."

"Yes, of course," said the little man, who now tried to appear helpful. "We must see what can be done. I understand that unless 50,000 francs is raised within the next few days, the house will come under the hammer."

"Exactly," I put in, rather uselessly ; "and none of us has got that much money at the moment."

"Whoever put up the money would only have to *lend* it," said Isadora. "It's such a trifling sum really. I can make lots of money dancing, and then there are my memoirs I'm writing. It

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seems so absurd not to be able to get such a small sum. The public may help me. Most of the papers have appealed on my behalf. But one can never trust the public. Once I've got my house again, I shall be able to start my school. I shall dance again. I've always been able to make as much money as I need. It's only because I gave all I had to the poor Russian children that I haven't any now."

"Of course, of course," said the newspaper man.

He was sitting on the edge of Isadora's bed with a second glass of whisky in his hand, and he said 'of course' in answer to almost everything. But I could see that, as his eyes took in the large proportions of the once slim dancer, he very much doubted if she would ever dance again for big sums of money.

He was probably right. I had seen Isadora dance only a few days before. I had thought her wonderful. She was wonderful. She couldn't help being wonderful because she had genius. But I realized, more than ever when I saw the little man looking at her so sceptically, how differently her performance—the same performance she had given in the studio—might affect

an audience with less sense of discrimination. To them she might appear as only a fat woman trying to dance her way back into their favour.

"I can't pay the hotel bill," she explained to the man on the bed. "Last time I had to sell a piece of property to get out of here. Now I've no property left to sell. Can't your paper do anything for me? You see I ought to have my school again. My school to teach children to grow up beautifully is as important as any hospital. And I'm sure you support hospitals. I've written an open letter to Henry Ford, asking for money to carry on my work, but he hasn't answered me yet."

"You don't think that by going to Paris yourself, you could help to save your house? Your personality . . ." suggested the little man.

Silly little man to suggest the very thing that I knew Isadora was only too anxious to do. For no other reason than to find Mitri she would have welcomed the opportunity of leaving Nice. And in Paris, she was likely to lose her head. For love she would have sacrificed anything. And her agent, who was paying her advance royalties

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in instalments on her memoirs, as she let him have parts of them, wanted her to remain in Nice to complete the work. Isadora, I had by this time begun to learn, had to be treated like a beautiful, but wilful child.

"I want to go to Paris," cried Isadora; "but how can I? I'm a prisoner in this great hotel, until I pay that bill." She seized the envelope off the bed and held it up in one hand—"They'll never let me move. In the old days, when I entertained my friends here, and because of me people spent thousands of francs here, they would have allowed me all the credit I wanted. But now . . . Hotel people have such short memories."

At this point in the discussion of how Isadora was to save her temple of art in Paris from being taken away from her for ever, G—— walked into the room. In that casual carefree way of his, which sometimes reminded me so much of Isadora herself, he said:

"Why don't you drive to Paris in the car. I'd come with you. And Sewell too. We could make a dash to Paris to save your house."

The romantic appeal of this idea took hold of Isadora at once.

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“That would be perfectly wonderful,” she said. “Who will come to Paris with me to save my house ? ”

Only stone-hearted people could have resisted her. As she asked the question, with the light of enthusiasm in her eyes, and all the glamour that was hers surrounding her like a great halo, it did not sound so foolish as it was. Even my practical common-sense—that instinct which told me the scheme was wild and useless—sounded to me rather cheap. A mad flight to Paris with Isadora. I saw the three of us racing northwards through the night ; and I saw Isadora’s hair—for she would soon have lost her hat—blown back from her head like flames. It appeared very attractive.

“I must be going,” said the little man, putting down his glass. “But if you do decide to drive to Paris, let me know. I’ll be there to see you off.”

The little man had seen and heard all he wanted.

In his paper the next morning there was not even a mention of Isadora, which only confirmed the impression his attitude, when leaving, had made on me. He had decided that Isadora’s

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career was over. That the world had lost its interest in her.

But I can hear that little man saying now, to his friends : “Isadora Duncan ! Why I *knew* her. She was a one. I said to her one night . . .”

He was that kind of little man.

* * * * *

V

THAT dash to Paris to save Isadora's house never materialized. Something went wrong with the car, and it had to go away for three days to be repaired. And for three days Isadora, stared at by everybody, walked round Nice. Once she 'slooped'.

It was late, and we were all three of us coming out of a cinema (to which Isadora insisted on going after dinner, exactly a quarter of an hour before the show was due to finish) when she suggested to G—— and myself that we should go to the studio.

"I shan't be able to sleep," she said. "It's only just midnight. We can buy some sandwiches at a café and have some supper. It won't be cold because I gave Josephine a few francs this morning, and told her to keep the stove going."

So carrying sandwiches, we started out to walk the three miles to the studio—that lonely

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green temple that cab-drivers refused to approach at that time of night, except for an exorbitant fare.

"It's a long way," I protested, faintly.
"Remember we have to get back."

It seemed to me that when I was with Isadora, I was always being too practical. For it was only when circumstances absolutely forced her to it, that she ever realized that time and space existed. And G——, who usually made up the two, was also vague about these things. Though both of them were older than myself, I frequently felt like a father who had the responsibility of looking after two children.

"Don't let's think about getting back" said Isadora. "We've got to get there first. If I walk too slowly for you, go on in front. Here's the key of the studio."

"I think I'll run," I said. "I like running."

"Then why not 'sloop'?" said Isadora.
"Like this . . ."

Isadora, in the middle of the deserted Promenade des Anglais lowered herself into a crouching position. She then bent down—her poor fur coat split a little more as she did this—and suddenly shot forward. She looked like a woolly bear scuttling into the lamp-lit darkness. But

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before she had gone very far, she stood up again, out of breath.

“ I can’t do it very well,” she gasped. “ But you’re younger. Indians used to ‘sloop’ through the long grass like that, carrying messages between the tribes. You make yourself as limp as you can, and let the weight of your body carry you forward.”

For a little way I ‘sloped’. But without any great success. Once more Isadora showed me how the best Red Indians did it. This time our activities were watched critically by a policeman from the other side of the wide road. He must have thought we were either drunk or mad ; but he did not arrest us. And finally, exhausted by our efforts we walked with arms linked, more slowly than before.

“ You should try it again, some time,” said Isadora ; “ it really is much quicker.”

I shall always think of Isadora when I walk along those flat paving stones. The sun may be shining with a brilliant whiteness, and the smart crowds, gathered out of all the capitals in Europe, may be thronging the Promenade des Anglais, But I shall still see it in the darkness of that night, when like a woolly bear about to jump.

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Isadora Duncan attempted to 'sloop' along its great length.

It was that night, too, as we went towards the studio with our sandwiches, that Isadora, quite suddenly, said :

"Life is so short, but it's funny, kind of strange, what contrasts one can experience. Now I never thought once that I should ever be without any money, 'sloping' "—the word stayed in our conversation that night—"along here, with only a packet of sandwiches. I don't mind. I'd rather have a car, because it's quicker. But I don't mind. Only it's strange, the difference."

Then she stood still, and turning right round pointed in the direction of Monte Carlo, a handful of lights twinkling back at us out of the darkness.

"Over there," she said, "at Cap Ferrat, there's an enormous house. You must have noticed it on the way to Monte Carlo. It's elaborate, and stands out because it's unlike anything else. The roof was especially copied for me from Versailles. It's a huge place." She turned back again, and as we continued our walk, said : "That house was built for me by my Millionaire. In the wall of that house you can still see the big

iron gate that he put up to keep me in—the gate of a very jealous man.”

“It was built for you? And it doesn’t belong to you any more?”

“Nothing belongs to me any more. Least of all my Millionaire, and the things he gave me. Some time ago I wrote to him and asked him to help me . . .”

Isadora paused.

“And he never answered?” I suggested.

“Yes, he answered me. But such a cable. It was terrible. It must have cost him a fortune to send from New York. And what he said in it! The expressions he used. The names he called me! It is a good thing I don’t mind what people think of me. What the post office must have thought when they read that cable . . .”

I said something uncomplimentary about Isadora’s Millionaire. But she smiled at me.

“You don’t know my Millionaire,” she said.

“He was a great influence in my life. I lived with him for a long time. The stories I could tell you about our life together. Such a strange life. None of it is going into the memoirs.”

“I wish you would tell me all about it. You know I have a passion for observing extraordinary

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lives. I get so tired of the kind of people one meets in every capital in Europe. Smart, smooth people, to whom nothing vital ever happens."

"I will if you like. I think you should know about my Millionaire."

"You think I *should* know about him?"

"Yes. You're a writer, even if you do usually drink water!" Isadora laughed. "My Millionaire would make such a wonderful character for a novel. A terrible character. All the other characters in the story would swim round him, humbly, like a lot of tiny fishes. Poor, helpless little fishes. Unless, of course, you put me in your book, too. I should stand up to him. I should be another terrible character in the book."

"When will you tell me about him?"

"To-morrow evening. *After* I've dictated my memoirs. But come to dinner first. I'll read you some of the memoirs I've already written. I shan't mind how much you laugh. I shall expect you to laugh."

On the following evening, at six o'clock, I went to see Isadora at the Negresco. I found her with her head in a trunk, sorting out piles

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of old letters and faded photographs. The floor was strewn with papers of all kinds. The room reminded me of a socialist newspaper office I had seen, in Genoa, after it had been raided by the Fascisti.

"You've come to dinner," she cried delightedly. "How nice of you. I'm alone, in such a muddle, with my papers. I've got to do some more memoirs to-night, and at the moment I don't seem to be able to remember anything."

"I've not come to dinner," I said, very firmly.

Isadora sat down on the bed and stared at me.

"But you said . . ." she began.

I interrupted her, more firmly, with the speech I had been preparing all the way from my hotel.

"Isadora, I will come and see you after dinner. And I will dine at my hotel, where, as I am staying *en pension*, it will be cheaper; and you will have something light to eat here. After that I will come back, you can read me your memoirs; dictate some more; and then tell me all about your Millionaire."

"But . . ."

"Isadora—surely that is the best plan. We

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none of us have too much money. You haven't the slightest idea how you are going to pay your hotel bill. Therefore it's simply madness to talk of having dinner here, where the food is very expensive. It's sweet of you, Isadora. But you can't afford it. Your bill is big enough already. Let us be practical, for once."

I felt guilty. After all, what business was it of mine? I did not know what answer to expect. Isadora said:

"You've been drinking water again, Sewell." Then she laughed. "Of course you'll dine with me. And G—— too."

"But the bill, Isadora," I protested.

"Well, that matters less than it did. I've decided to give a concert in the studio. I'll sell as many tickets as we like to get printed, at 100 francs each. Some of the tickets I'll give to the hall-porter downstairs, to sell. Once that's done everything will be perfectly all right. The porter will be pleased with his commission; and when the hotel people know that I'm working again they won't bother me about my bill. After all, they haven't bothered me about it yet. They've only sent it up."

We did not argue. I could not argue with

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Isadora. Her wistful eyes always made me feel in the wrong.

"If you'll only concentrate on me for a few weeks," she said, "we can make a fortune. I've made money before; I can do it again. Only I can't do anything alone. You must stand by me. Be my manager."

If the suggestion had not seemed to me to be altogether absurd, I might have felt flattered.

"But how can I be your manager? I've never been anybody's manager. I shouldn't know how to start."

"To start you could go over to Monte Carlo and interview a dressmaker. Say that I'm writing a book of memoirs, which is to be illustrated, and then suggest to them, very nicely, that I'd look well photographed in one of their new creations."

A knock at the door, followed by the entrance of Mrs. Nickson, who hoped to take down from dictation what Isadora could remember of her past life, put an end to this scheme.

"I don't feel like doing memoirs," was Isadora's greeting to the new arrival.

"But Isadora, you said half-past six."

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“Yes, but how can I suddenly be brilliant, and start thinking of things? It’s not possible.”

While the two discussed the possibility of any work on the memoirs being done that evening, I wondered which I felt most sorry for. Isadora, flowerlike and glamorous, reclining on the bed, called upon heaven to witness the tragedy of an artist who is forced to bring forth inspiration to order. She was beautifully, and genuinely pathetic. But I could not feel less sorry for Mrs. Nickson, who, willing as she was to help her friend, found it impossible to make any plans of her own, so vague was Isadora’s idea of keeping an appointment.

“Just when I don’t feel like memoirs,” Isadora said plaintively, “you arrive. But when I’m feeling really brilliant there is never anybody to take down my thoughts. In the middle of the night I think of things that would make my book almost worth reading. But what’s the use . . .?”

“You promised,” I said, “that if I came to dinner you’d do memoirs. I’ll stay to dinner.”

“Very well,” Isadora turned to Mrs. Nickson.

“Will you stay too?”

But Mrs. Nickson declined with thanks. She

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would go home to rest, she said, and return at nine o'clock.

Half an hour later Isadora sat on one side of a delicious dinner that had been brought into her room, while G—— and I faced her across the table. A bottle of champagne, golden-necked and amorous peered at us from among its cushions of ice. The food, superbly cooked, sizzled beautifully on our plates. There was comfort, and warmth in the atmosphere, and that flavour of wickedness which hot meals invariably bring to the bedroom of a diner who is not an invalid.

“It reminds me,” I said, “of the last act of Edward Sheldon’s *Romance*. Only there’s no faithful dresser to wait on her mistress. Have you never had a faithful dresser, Isadora; a female who has dressed you for every performance, for no wages at all?”

“I’ve only had faithful *undressers*,” laughed Isadora, “and they were all men. Faithful undressers, it’s nearly as amusing as *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*.” Isadora became suddenly serious again. “Now there was a book! so true to life. Look at Lorelei; she got everything she wanted. She had no conventions, and she understood life. Now nobody

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could accuse me of being conventional"—we all smiled at that—"yet I don't seem to understand life. But Lorelei liked jewels, and I don't. That makes all the difference. It's the women who do like them, of course, that get on. Do you remember? Lorelei said a kiss was all very well, but a diamond bracelet lasted for ever. Something like that. Well, Lorelei was right.

"Look at X—— to-day," went on Isadora. "She's one of the most famous actresses in France. Her reputation, chiefly off the stage, it's true, is European. She's happy. She still has lovers. She's enormously rich. Why? She's rich because she's never lost an opportunity in her life. She's a lucky woman; lucky because she has all through her life been able to do the things I've never been able to do. I see in the *Daily Mail* this morning that X——has sent a thousand francs towards saving my house. It's very sweet of her. But she can afford it. Through me she's made a great deal of money."

"Through you?" I did not quite understand.

"Yes, through me, indirectly. I'll tell you how," said Isadora, "when I've finished wrestling

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with this chicken bone. That's it, yes, through me. Many years ago X—— and I were great friends. We are still. But we've always had exactly opposite temperaments. That's why we've always kept friends. We never clashed. We managed, without any trouble to ourselves, to help one another. At least, I was always able to help X——. Because I don't believe X—— was ever really in love in her life. Or if she was, she quickly forgot it, unless there was something more to be gained from it than merely a return of affection. X—— set out to make a success of her life, and she's certainly succeeded. I wanted success, too; a different kind of success. And I had my success, but now all that's left of it, is the memory. I kept on falling desperately in love with people, while X—— kept on falling desperately in love with jewels. X—— was wise. She understood life. But I couldn't help myself. I simply had to be in love with beauty all the time. When an old millionaire said he was coming to have tea at my house in Paris, I used to ask X—— to come, too.

“ ‘But,’ X—— used to say, ‘he's a millionaire, Isadora, how can you spare him?’ ”

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“‘I can spare him,’ I used to say, ‘because, X——, I’m terribly in love with *Cecil.’

“‘But Cecil! But he’s only a poor artist. Almost starving.’

“‘He has a beautiful soul.’

“‘Very well, Isadora dear, I’ll come along for tea.’

“And she always came,” finished Isadora, “and never left my house without the millionaire’s arm to support her. She had ‘a way’ with millionaires. You can’t think how many jewels X—— collected, all the time I was discovering poets’ souls. I’m not defending myself!” Isadora was emphatic. “Not at all. I simply happen to have been made like that. It’s my misfortune.”

“And your own millionaire, Isadora?”

“I’ll tell you about him later this evening. Now listen to this . . .”

While her chocolate soufflé became cold on her plate, Isadora took up a sheaf of manuscript from the floor, and read :

‘His eyes, very near-sighted, flashed steely behind his glasses. He gave one the impression

* Cecil was not the name actually used by Isadora in this conversation.

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of delicacy, a certain almost womanly weakness. Only his hands with their broad tipped fingers and simian square thumbs bespoke strength.

I, like one hypnotized, allowed him to put my cape over my little white tunic. He took my hand, we flew down the stairs to the street.

In Berlin he took me to his studio. There was a black, waxed floor with rose leaves, artificial rose leaves, strewn all over it.

Here stood before me, brilliant youth, beauty, genius ; and all inflamed with sudden love. I flew into his arms with all the magnetic willingness of a temperament which had for two years lain dormant, but waiting to spring forth.

Here I found an answering temperament, worthy of my metal. In him I had met the flesh of my flesh, the blood of my blood.'

Isadora dropped the manuscript on the floor, took a sip of Champagne.

"That's a sample of what my memoirs are like," she said. "Too terrible because I can't write. But what makes it even more stupid is that I'm not allowed to mention by name any of the people who are living. As if they'd mind.

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In that bit I've just read you, I'm talking about dear——. I adored him, and he adored me. And I'm certain he wouldn't mind finding his name in my memoirs. He'd expect to. I was with him when his mother wrote her memoirs. He read them. When he came to the end of the book he threw it across the room, and said: 'What's my poor father done, that he's been left out of the book. He was a perfectly good man; but Mother seems to have forgotten all about him.' And that's what's wrong with all the memoirs I read. I can hardly recognise my friends from their reminiscences. Print seems to make them forget the most important events in their lives, and to give themselves virtues they never had, or wanted to have. Perfectly absurd!"

Perfectly absurd! How often have I heard Isadora use those words. Anything she could not understand, a point of view she could not bring herself to share, was 'perfectly absurd.' That night, talking about memoirs, which at the time were of great financial importance to her, she must have used it fifty times.

"And when they're written," she said, "what will be the use of them?"

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I saw what she meant. To her the book, when finished, would be a poor skeleton of a life-story, quite lifeless. When, later, Mrs. Nickson arrived to take down some more of the book from dictation, it was obvious from the manner in which Isadora recited them that the events, as she dragged them from the past, stirred no emotion in herself. Sitting back from the table, she called up again, very slowly, some of the great figures she had known. There came into the room, as she spoke, the phantoms of artists, and sculptors, and musicians she had known in Paris—names, most of them, that are famous. But they remained only names. About each she recited some anecdote that she obviously did not find very amusing. Then she would interrupt herself:

“But what I’ve just said about Rodin doesn’t mean anything.”

“It’s amusing.”

“Amusing? Yes, it may be amusing, but it doesn’t tell anybody *anything*. It doesn’t explain Rodin any more than it explains me. And my book is full of that kind of thing. Publishers seem to like it. But I can’t think who is going to buy the book.”

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"If it is full of anecdotes about the famous people you have met," I said, "it will probably have a very large sale. The middle classes will read it with avidity."

"The middle classes?" Isadora was interested. "I know so little about the middle classes," she sighed. "They have always bored me. Perhaps I have bored them."

"It would be difficult for you to bore anybody, Isadora."

"I suppose it would. Somebody else said that to me once. But I'll tell you about that later. Now tell me, why have the middle classes always loved me? I love the lower classes, the working people; and I've always loved the idle rich—but the middle classes I've never understood."

"Any more than they'd ever understand you."

"I suppose not. There aren't any middle class artists—real artists. I expect that's why."

Many tasks would have been lighter than coaxing Isadora to dictate her memoirs. She would frequently say that she had done enough; and as frequently it was necessary for either Mrs.

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Nickson or myself to persuade her to deliver herself of just one more anecdote. But when the last word for that evening had been dictated, and the secretary had departed, she seemed to wake up.

“ Shall I tell you something about my life ? ” she said, “ something real, not the anecdotal rubbish that you say the public is going to like so much.”

I was reminded, as she asked me this question, of what Somerset Maugham had said to me not many months before. I said :

“ I should feel as honoured as Mr. Maugham did, when Lily Langtry, during a crossing to America, told him the story of her life.”

“ Did Maugham ever write Lily Langtry’s life ? ”

“ No.”

“ Why not ? She must have had such interesting experiences. Almost as interesting as mine.”

“ But she only told him them in confidence. Not to be ‘ written up ’. I expect they would have considered a book on the subject indiscreet, and very vulgar.”

“ The world is indiscreet and vulgar.” Isadora

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thought. She then added: "I'll tell you about the two occasions in my life of which I sometimes feel ashamed. And I'll tell you about my Millionaire. None of these things appear in the memoirs I'm writing, so that only you will know of them. Then you'll be able to write a story about me. I've always inspired the young artists I've known. Perhaps I'll inspire you."

"To write a novel!"

"No, a biography. Why shouldn't you? If you told people what I'm going to tell you, they'd understand me, probably, far better than they do now. Whatever they think of me, can't be worse than what they already think. And as I've no children, and no husband to think of, why not tell them the truth?"

"Haven't you mentioned your Millionaire in the memoirs?" I asked.

"I've mentioned him. But not by name. Over in that trunk is a great stack of his letters. He has offered hundreds of dollars to get them back. Fancy a man wanting to buy back love-letters. As if I'd sell them. The most sensational newspaper in America has offered me a huge sum for them, too. But in that old trunk

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they remain. There are hundreds of them*.

"Have you been kind to your Millionaire in the memoirs?"

"He'll probably think so. I've repeated something he once said to me. I don't think I could have done anything worse. I read to him aloud from the poems of Walt Whitman, and when I'd finished, he said:

"'If that man had to earn his living by his poetry, he wouldn't earn enough to keep himself from starvation.' My Millionaire said that about Walt Whitman! I've repeated what he said. In that repetition I consider I've said the worst about him that could be said of any man."

"I don't suppose he'll mind that much," I said.

"Probably not," Isadora pushed across the bottle of brandy. "Pour yourself out some, or you'll begin to think I've let him off lightly, too. And I haven't."

She never told me the name of her Millionaire, but from the description she gave me of him that

* Since her death, I have read in an American paper: "Isadora Duncan intimated that she was going to publish some of the love-letters she had received. 'They are going to ruin a lot of families,' she remarked."

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night, Lohengrin, as she called him in her memoirs, became a very real figure in my imagination.

“ I first met him,” said Isadora, “ when I was young—very young. The moment he came up to me, and introduced himself, I thought : Lohengrin. He was tall and blonde, with curling hair and a beard. And we fell in love. He was so beautiful to look at then, and I was too young, too much in love I suppose, to see that his mind was not as beautiful. He loved me, but all the time he was laughing to himself at my ideals—Plato’s ‘ Republic,’ Karl Marx, my ideas for reforming the world. He was a very commanding man, a man who had always to be obeyed. It was not long before we had our first quarrel. And after that . . . Well, we were always quarrelling, and making it up. Sometimes we separated for a long time. But in the end he came back to me. It seemed to be impossible for him to leave me alone. I was sorry, at times, that I had ever met my Millionaire ; and again, I would be glad.

“ He was fantastic. He used to think himself a little Napoleon ; that whatever he did was right. Yet everything he did went wrong.

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Once an idea seized hold of him, he would not let it go. He carried out whatever plan came into his head ; never with any success. With all his money he was not happy. He was a jealous man, with a terrible temper. If his food didn't satisfy him in every detail, he just flung it in his chef's face. Really, he did that. I used to sit at the table, nervous of the scene I knew he was about to make. When the chef came in from the kitchen, my Millionaire, after pointing out what he considered was wrong with the pheasant, or whatever the dish was, simply picked it up and flung it across the man's face. Madness ! I used to tell him so. But what was the use ? When one has as much money as he has, one can do the most terrible things. How I hated that man at times ; and yet, do you know, at times I could feel desperately sorry for him.

“ Once, during the early days of our friendship, he took it into his head that I must dance ; for him alone. For this dance everything had to be perfect. The setting had to be real. It was to be such a dance as I had never given before. A dance (I could read it in his mind) about which he would be able to boast for years to come. I was on his yacht then, and it was decided that

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I should dance for him by moonlight outside the Temple of Paeston, at Pompeii. A special Neapolitan orchestra was hired. It was all to be very romantic, very grand, but on the day there was such a storm, with a deluge of rain, that the yacht was unable to leave the harbour for twenty-four hours. We arrived, a day late, to find the orchestra, drenched to the skin, waiting on the steps of the temple. I've told the story in the memoirs."

Isadora broke off her narrative to grope among the pile of typescript at her feet. "Yes, here it is." She read :

"Lohengrin ordered dozens of bottles of wine and a *lamb a la Pelicaire*, which we ate in Arab fashion with our fingers. The orchestra made a brave attempt to play to us on deck, but as the yacht began to rock, one by one they turned green and retired to the cabins And that was the end of the romantic idea of my dancing by moonlight outside the Temple of Paeston at Pompeii."

Isadora dropped the script on to the floor again.

"It was a typical ending. Everything my Millionaire did ended like that, in utter failure.

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We loved each other, and I think we hated each other by turns. I went on dancing all over Europe and America. I would try to forget him. But he always turned up again, came back into my life. He seemed to me to be always there, lurking in the background, watching me. I could do nothing, because he had for me a certain fascination. We lived together. He built me beautiful houses. He financed my school. He loved me. He quarrelled with me. Once he nearly built me a theatre. The land he bought for it, in Paris, is still his: nothing more than a very valuable piece of waste land. It was mine once, together with all the other things he wanted to give me. Now nothing is mine—except my debts. It is strange to sit here now, in this bedroom I can't pay for, and think of all the riches he piled on me . . .” Isadora stared at me, quizzically. “You're wondering what I've done with all the presents he showered on me? But I never accepted any from him. Not a single jewel. He was always talking to me of the way women ran after him for his money and the presents he gave them; and I used to tell him that I was the one exception. He ran after me. And I never accepted

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his lavish gifts. Not, mind you"—Isadora was emphatic—"that the refusal was anything in my favour. I've never liked jewels. Sometimes I wish I had. I wouldn't be so poor now. But do you think my Millionaire was pleased to find I didn't run after him for his money? No! I think it made him more irritated with me than if I'd tried to seduce his fortune from him. That was like him. With all his wealth he was never happy. He was too jealous of me to make me happy either."

After a pause during which Isadora appeared to be painfully reminded of the influential past her wild Millionaire had played in her life, I asked her if she had seen him lately.

"Not lately," she replied.

"He has forgotten all about you?"

"Never! He will never forget me. I think he still loves me enough to want to hurt me. Some months ago I asked him to help me. I needed the money badly. But the reply he sent me." Isadora frowned. "Such a reply. It seems that when I upset people they get so furious that they can't restrain their language. The cable cost a small fortune to send."

"How beastly of him."

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“I can imagine, though, the pleasure it gave him to send it. Ever since we’d met each other, through even our most impassioned moments together, he has been jealous of me. Always, because I am an artist, there has been something in me that he has never understood; some subtlety, that, in spite of myself, has kept him out. Naturally he has always resented that. He, more than any other man, would. Being a millionaire he thought he could buy *anything*. And, of course, nobody can buy the soul. I can sell any man this body,” she beat herself lightly on her bosom, “that is easy. But even if I wanted to, I couldn’t sell my soul. I could give my soul, for a time—to another artist. I have done that. In exchange for a perfect rendering of Beethoven I could give myself, body and soul, quite easily. But for diamonds, money—I could only give my body. And as my Millionaire was not an artist, my soul never belonged to him. It belonged sometimes to other artists, which made him very angry. In me he found a kind of defiance of his will. I suppose that fascinated him. He would not leave me alone. But it wasn’t my fault. Once I loved him. Then I must have wanted to give him my soul

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with my body. But I couldn't. It simply wasn't in my power to give it. Now you can understand how he, a man whose sense of drama was only melodramatic, must have felt when he received my appeal for help. 'At last' he said to himself—I can hear him saying it—'she comes to me. Before I have always gone to her. Now she comes to me!' Only some such feeling of cheap triumph could have made him send me the terrible cable he did. I have kept it. I shall not show it to you.

"But there were times when I treated my Millionaire badly. Times when he had reason to be angry with me. What mad people the two of us must have seemed to the outside world. Always quarrelling, always loving. What a life! Once—and this is one of the two occasions in my life of which I have since felt ashamed—I was living with my Millionaire at his English country house. It rained. Not a gentle shower, but heavy, constant rain, all day long. I used to look through the windows and see a dark, dull landscape. Every tree looked hopeless, dead. I thought I should die if the hopelessness continued. My Millionaire was ill in bed. It was impossible for him to leave his

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room. But he managed to rule his household just the same. From his room his orders were issued to every member of his staff, including myself. Nobody dared to disobey him. The place was like a prison. I knew that if I did not dance I might as well be dead. So I sent to my agents in London and told them to send me down a musician to play for me. When I had done that I felt happier. I knew they would send a good musician, because they understood my needs perfectly. I had sent to them before. I lived then for the time of the musician's arrival.

“When the musician arrived, though, and I met him at the station with my car, all my hopes of happiness vanished instantly. The musician they had sent me was ugly. Not plain, but really ugly. Repulsive. I can't explain to you what his face was like. I only know that to look at him made me feel physically sick. It would have made me shudder to have touched him. I knew the moment I saw him that I should not be able to dance at all if he played for me. And he knew too. I could see by the expression on his poor ugly face that he knew. Yet there was a kind of conceit

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about him, that strange vanity all ugly or deformed people have.

“What surprised me so much was that my agents should have sent this little ugly man to me. Once before in London, they had sent him, and I had told them that he was no use ; that I was unable to work with such a repulsive—he was *repulsive*—creature in the room with me. I told the poor man, quite frankly, the truth. Then he pleaded with me. It was dreadful, the poor, wretched creature telling me that it would make a great difference to him if he had to return to London without the job. He simply could not, he said, afford to lose the engagement. He begged me to try him. I refused. He begged me again. In the end I said I would try him.

“He was a very good musician. But his face. No, I can’t describe it. I could never make you realize how horrible it was. I couldn’t look at him. I told him that if he played for me he would have to sit with a screen round him, to hide himself. I hated to have to tell him that, but he said that he understood. So whenever he played, he surrounded himself, hid himself completely with a folding screen. I danced to

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the music, I expressed the beauty of its meaning with my body, and if ever my head happened to turn in the direction of the music, I saw only the screen.

“For another week the rain poured down. It was impossible to leave the house, except for a drive in a closed car; and this I did each afternoon. My Millionaire was still ill in bed, ordering his household autocratically from his sick-room. I used to go for drives with a woman friend who was staying with me. One afternoon this friend said to me :

“ ‘Really, Isadora, you can’t go on ignoring the wretched little musician as you do. He’s positively unhappy. He’s not able to get out of the house. Why not ask him to come for a drive with us. He would be so pleased.’ ”

“At first the idea sounded impossible. I have always loved beautiful things, my whole career has been devoted to the cult of the beautiful, and the thought of having that little gargoyle of a man next to me in the car, made me feel uncomfortable. Finally however, my friend, with difficulty, persuaded me to overcome what she imagined was a prejudice on my part. And the three of us went for a drive. I am not sure how

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it came about, I think we left my friend at some place where she was to stay for dinner ; anyhow, on the way home I know that I was alone in the car with the little ugly man. I did not look at him more than I could help, but I *felt* that he was looking at me. And all at once a very strange thing happened. A thing I have never been able to account for. The car, in taking a corner too sharply threw me into the man's arms. I stayed there. He remained still, making no effort to hold me ; and I stayed. I looked up into his face, the same repulsive face that had filled me with such loathing, and saw that he was beautiful. It was the same face, yet it wasn't the same face at all. Looking at him I wondered how could I ever have thought him repulsive ; what had induced me to ask him to hide himself behind a screen. For he was—beautiful !

“ But really beautiful,” said Isadora again, “ or so it seemed to me. In a moment I was in love with him. It sounds too absurd. But that is exactly how it happened. One moment the poor musician filled me with a repulsion for him that was so strong I was unable not to show it ; the next I was in love with him. And we

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became lovers. In that prison of a house we loved. When he played for me I danced for him. It seemed to me incredible that I could ever have put a screen to hide an ugliness, which, for me, had suddenly become beauty.

"I made no secret of my love for him. I have never made a secret of love. Everybody in the house, except my Millionaire, could see how much we were in love with each other. My maid, who was devoted to me, warned me that my Millionaire was suspicious, that the staff were carrying tales to him. But I didn't mind. When one is in love, one does not mind. Not even a repulsive face. For I suppose the musician still had a repulsive face, though when I came to look at him after that moment in the car, I used to ask myself how I could ever have thought it.

"Then, one day my Millionaire called me into his room, and told me I had been making love to the musician. As I didn't think he could possibly know, that he was only trying to make me give myself away, I said it wasn't true. When he repeated that it was, I went on denying the truth. Now that"—Isadora was childishly wistful—"was wrong of me. I should have told

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him the truth. I wasn't ashamed of it ; and in any case he knew it."

"Are you sure he knew ? "

"He made me quite sure. It turned out that he knew everything. He was like that—my Millionaire. He was so jealous of me that he had had a telephone fixed in every room in the house—the kind of telephone that if he listened in from his end, he could hear what went on in all the other rooms. And, as he'd been ' listening in ' quite a lot while he'd been ill, he'd heard quite a lot."

Isadora smiled at the recollection of what her Millionaire must have heard. She said :

"Imagine how I felt. While I stood before him, after having denied all that he had accused me of, he repeated back to me, word for word, my most impassioned speeches to the musician. He'd heard them all. He repeated them, mockingly, like a villain in a play. He seemed to think it was all my fault."

"Wasn't it ? "

"In a way I suppose it was. But then how was I to know he'd had telephones fixed in every room ? That part of it was his fault. If it hadn't been for the telephones I should never

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have been found out. So really the whole thing was my Millionaire's fault. The part I'm sorry about, the part I regret, was making love to the musician while my Millionaire was ill. That was mean of me. I should have waited until he recovered. Then I could have made love before him; it would not have mattered so much. But then, love can never wait. It is something outside ourselves."

In that story of her love for the little ugly musician, Isadora revealed herself as a great lover. It is useless to say, as I have no doubt most of the people who read this particular story will say, that Isadora was merely making an excuse when she blamed her Millionaire for having fixed his telephones in order to overhear her conversations. She was not excusing herself. Had anybody else, when found out as she was, said her words, in most cases the words would have represented merely a feeble excuse, but in Isadora's case they were the expression of the truth, as she saw it.

"And was that the end of the story?"

Before she answered me Isadora was silent, and afraid, for perhaps a minute. Always she had been misunderstood, had seen her conceptions

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of love ridiculed and made coarse. Now, I could see, she was wondering if I too would misunderstand her.

“I ran away from my Millionaire’s house,” she said, “I ran away with the musician.”

“And you never saw your Millionaire again?”

I concluded the story for her. But she shook her head, laughed at my ending.

“Is that how you would like it to have ended? No, it was not like that. That would have been a novel. It was the musician I never saw again. My Millionaire wired for me to go back to him. Ten days later I went back. The musician and I parted, after ten days of love. And on the tenth day I loved him less than on the first. That is life . . . For ten days our love was a very perfect thing. After that . . . It is not a pretty fairy story, but it is true. In it is a piece of the real me, that I cannot help. I was made to love in a certain way, just as I was made to suffer in a certain way. I’ve always loved, and I’ve always suffered. I shall go on loving and suffering until the end, I expect.

“But the last time I saw my Millionaire; I will tell you about that. It will appeal to you, Sewell, because you are so fond of the

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theatre. Well"—Isadora took another sip from her glass—"the scene is New York. My Millionaire and I are dining together. We are friends now, not lovers. That is the last mad scheme of our lives together. We have decided that in future our friendship is to be platonic; in that way we will enjoy perfect peace. Each is to go his own way.

"What it came to was this," Isadora continued, "that my Millionaire was trying to make me believe he no longer cared for me. It occurred to him as a new way of hurting me—to try and make me feel that I was no longer attractive to him.

"‘You may be right,’ I told him; ‘these years of our love have probably been a great mistake. From to-night we cease to be lovers. Now we are friends. We can tell each other everything. There is one question I should like to ask you. I want to know something that any woman in my position would be curious to know.’

"‘What is it?’ he asked me. I can see him now, asking me, staring at me intently.

"‘I should like to know,’ I said, ‘what it is about me that has attracted you all these years.

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We've had so many quarrels, but after each of them you've come back to me. Why is it? I wonder. With your wealth you've had almost every woman ready to eat out of your hand. Women far more beautiful than I am. Yet, for some strange reason, each time you've come back to me.'

"'Yes, my God, that's true,' said my Millionaire. He seemed as interested in the subject as I was myself. He thought for some time, then he said :

"'I know what it is about you, two things have kept me to you. Just two things, important things.' I asked him what they were. He told me: 'You've got a good skin,' he said, 'and you've *never* bored me.'

"That," said Isadora, "is what my Millionaire said to me. He was right. I have a good skin still. And I don't think I often bore people, I scandalize them, of course, but I believe they like that. It's boredom that's the unforgivable sin."

For hours Isadora talked. For hours she amused me with anecdotes from her life, which, since they appear in her memoirs, have no place here. By the time she rose from her seat

at the table the remains of our food were congealed and unappetizing on the plates. She moved, very gracefully, over to the window, and pulled back a little of the brocade curtain. Silhouetted against the pale dawn that tried weakly to creep into the room, she stood quite still. She seemed to have quite forgotten the earth. The room, and the presence of G——and myself in it, had ceased to exist for her. Her mind might have been taking her back to her childhood, or a thousand years into the future. But wherever it took her she found sadness, and tragedy. Mirrored in the pitiful bulk of her, as much as in the lines of her face, was the love and the suffering she had known. Light loves, followed by petty sufferings, could not have given to her body the tragic beauty she now displayed so unconsciously. Nothing less than an intensity of passion and sorrow could have left her as she was now left—jagged, beginning to fear life. In the ghastly illumination made by a mixture of dawn and electric light, she looked suddenly, for a few seconds, terrifying. I had the horrible impression that every kiss the beautiful softness of her had felt, had bruised the skin, till she was nothing but a great still

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bruise, crying to be healed. But this travesty of her still Homeric beauty faded as she let the curtain fall, stood once more in the light of the lamp.

"Boxers," said Isadora, coming back to the table, "athletes of any kind, make the worst lovers." The remark came unexpectedly. It followed on her thoughts. "I was thinking," she explained, "of Kid McCoy. Not that he ever loved me. But some people thought he did. Just because he gave me massage, at Palm Beach. You see a real athlete trains so hard that all the sensitiveness goes out of his body. After that he can only make love like a wooden toy . . . But I must tell you of the only other occasion in my life about which I have regrets

"You've heard, of course, of B—— T——. I don't suppose there is anybody in the world who hasn't. Film stars enjoy such enormous publicity. Beside some of them even I feel quite unknown. Well, before she was as famous as she afterwards became, this star fell in love with a very dear relative of mine. They came over from New York to stay with me. And it seemed to me, then, that the woman was not

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suited to be the constant companion of my relative. He was nervous, full of ideals; she was dark, Jewish, vital, very materialistic. As the days passed I could see that he began to live in terror of her. The more entirely this great, voluptuous creature monopolized him, the less of him, in every way, there seemed to be. It was painful for me to watch the will of the member of my family I most adored, being gradually absorbed. Her enormous vitality, and the close watch she kept over him, got on my own nerves almost as much as on his. Finally I took the matter into my hands.

“I found, as I had expected, that this dear relative of mine was living in constant dread of the woman’s monopoly. She had followed him from America to England, and he was now ready to believe that she would follow him everywhere, until the end of his life. So I planned to part him from her. At a minute’s notice I bought him a ticket for the first distant place that came into my head—a remote village somewhere in Russia—gave him a rug, and all the money I had in my bag at the time; and pushed him into the railway carriage. When I arrived back home I pretended to the infuriated

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woman that I hadn't the slightest idea of her lover's whereabouts. Finally, she returned to America, and I cabled to my relative that it was safe for him to return.

"At the time I knew I had done the right thing. My relative was grateful to me, said I had saved his life. Even now I sometimes feel that I did. But at other times my conscience tells me that I did that other woman a great wrong. If she loved my relative, as no doubt she did, even if it was bad for him, I had no right to interfere. Love should be no concern of a third person's. Perhaps you can't understand me. But then you haven't seen, as I have, that woman's big black eyes staring out of the darkness. They are black, yet they shine in the darkness. When I'm suffering, too, I can't help thinking of her ; thinking that once I must have caused her to suffer. I thought of her to-night before you came."

Isadora gazed, hopelessly, at the carpet. She stood perfectly still, as a few moments before she had stood by the window. As then, nothing tangible appeared to be even remotely concerned with her ; the room, the furniture, her visitors, ceased to exist. Her dress, her body even, was

no longer a part of her. Only her tortured soul was there. Suffering incarnate.

Presently, her graceful movements giving to her again an earthly personality, she moved swiftly over to the glass-panelled wardrobe. She opened a cupboard on the back of which hung Mitri's grey overcoat. She pulled one of its sleeves round her bare throat, closed her eyes, and stroked it. Then she wept; called softly the name of the owner of the coat.

I knew, as I watched her, that I had no right to be watching. What I saw was too intimate to be seen. It made me shudder, painfully, as the sight of an open wound would have done. In her action was something too real to be observed without pain; the pain one feels in those infrequent moments when accidentally a mask is ripped away to expose some grisly reality.

G—— and I were about to leave the room when Isadora, the coat in her arms, came towards us.

"Thank you both," she said, as in turn we kissed her *au revoir*, "for preserving my reputation."

At that I could not help smiling, which

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fortunately broke the dramatic tension that a few seconds before had filled the room.

"I'm afraid we've ruined your reputation," I said. "We came to dine with you in your bedroom at eight o'clock last night. It's now seven o'clock in the morning."

"You'd have ruined anybody else's reputation," and as she spoke she smiled through her tears; "but Isadora Duncan's you've merely preserved. It's what's expected of me by the world that can't understand."

"There were two of us here," I said hopefully.

"That will merely make them think," Isadora replied, "that in my old age my vices have become more than ever rococo!"

VI

I remember sitting in a corner of a café with Isadora, in the early hours of the morning, eating, communistically, sizzling Welsh rarebit out of a round tin dish. We fed each other alternately with the same fork, to the slight surprise of the bourgeois gathering round us ; a gathering composed chiefly of prosperous shopkeepers, American tourists, 'pretty-ladies,' and French army officers. While what was left of the Welsh rarebit became a congealed mess at the bottom of the tin, Isadora talked, as she loved to talk, of Russia.

"At a theatre there one night," she said, "suddenly all the lights went out half way through my dance. I was left standing on a stage which was lit only by a little red oil lamp, faced by an auditorium of Russian peasants, who, having waited several hours in the snow to see me, were not likely to show much patience when the house was thrown into darkness. After hesitating for a second I seized the red lamp

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and held it high above my head. So that out of the blackness I appeared to my audience like some symbolic red figure leading the way. And they cheered me loudly. But I realized that their enthusiasm was not likely to last for long. Something had to be done to prevent them from making a riot. And I found myself saying to them: 'I have been giving you my art, won't you now give me yours for a little while? I want to hear the songs of the people of Russia. Won't you sing them to me?' This suggestion of mine caught the feelings of the crowd immediately. They sang to me in chorus the peasant songs that were life to them—or their escape from life. For an hour and a half I listened to them while they sang to me, all the time keeping my arm, which had become so painful I could hardly hold it in position, well above my head. For I knew that the moment I lowered that light the whole situation would be lost. I knew that during the time I had stood there, I had become a red symbol to them. In me they no longer saw Isadora Duncan, but the red hope of some future deliverance. Presently disturbing sounds warned me that the audience would soon stop singing, remember who I really was, and make

the kind of stampede Russians make so easily. Scarcely knowing what I said, for the pain in my arm was practically unbearable, I begged the audience for one more of their national songs. To this they agreed, and I shuddered at the thought of what might happen when they came to the end. They sang a song about the dawn of a new life, and as the chorus of this last song died away, a wonderful thing, it seemed to them, happened. One by one, very slowly, the lights in the theatre came to life again, until gradually my own little red lamp was extinguished in the blaze of the other lights. Really, of course, the management had at last got the lights to work. But to the excited peasants it seemed that a prayer had been answered, and that a new dawn, with a promise of better days to come, had broken for them. They cheered me as I have seldom been cheered before. A chance turned what might have resulted in a little revolution, into something simple and beautiful."

The impression this anecdote of Isadora's made on me was such, that I accepted from her extended fork, without shrinking, a piece of cold unappetising Welsh rarebit. I imagined the episode of which she had just spoken, very

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vividly. To anybody knowing Isadora, this was not difficult. Always she seemed to be more a symbolic figure than a single personality. Striding at the head of an army, a soldier's cap jammed on to her flaming head, singing the *Marseillaise*, was a situation in which it was not difficult to imagine her. As the leader of any revolution she would have been more than impressive.

Outside the café, though, Isadora changed. The first signs of dawn in the sky, the dim coldness of the street after a brightly warmed interior; whatever it was, produced on her the effect of unreasonable petulance. Finding herself in front of a row of taxis, she decided it would be delightful to drive to Marseilles in one of them. She inquired of a driver with a red bulbous nose how much he would charge to take us. From Nice the drive was an absurdly long one to make in a taxi, but the sum mentioned by the driver was even more absurd, fantastic. I started to walk away up the street, but Isadora would stop, arguing.

I went back to her, to try and point out to her that the drive to Marseilles was utterly reasonless, that between us we had not the money

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to pay for it. For some little while she would not listen to me. She continued her argument with the driver. And the driver, I could see, was all the time humouring poor Isadora. '*C'est la Duncan*' was what he was saying to himself, with a mental shrug of his shoulders. It was only what many of the less intelligent servants who came into contact with her said about Isadora among themselves. And it made one angry, watching the entertainment she unconsciously afforded them, the obvious pleasure they took in it.

I have recently been reminded of the occurrence of the taxi-driver by an incident, somewhat similar in outlook, which occurred while I was searching for the pictures of Isadora with which to illustrate this book. I found myself in the top room—garret would better describe it—of a photographic agency in Fleet Street. My inquiry, of a little rat-faced man, who reminded me of nothing so much as an unsavoury tooth-brush, for pictures of Isadora, resulted in his producing for me a photo of her which had been taken when she was a young woman. On the back of this picture was printed the caption: "Isadora Duncan: exponent of Greek dancing

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and Free-love." My eyes, as I looked up from the words, met those of the little man standing over me. In his face was an expression which instantly reminded me of the bulbous-nosed taxi-driver.

"She must have been," he said, grinning and nodding at the photograph, "one of them high steppers. Bit warm I should think!"

Poor Isadora. She had convinced other great artists of her conception of beauty, of the message she had to deliver for the good of mankind. But to the majority of the populace she died 'a high stepper'; a woman who was 'a bit warm.'

When at last I persuaded Isadora to give up the idea of driving to Marseilles in a taxi—which she was reluctant to do, because she had in mind, I believe, the thought that Marseilles was nearer Paris than Nice, and in Paris was Mitri—she said to me :

"Sewell, how rude you are to me. Do you know, *I* wouldn't have thought of talking to *Duse* as you've just been talking to me."

"I'm sorry, Isadora. But then," I suggested, "I don't suppose *Duse* ever irritated you so stupidly. I don't suppose she ever took it into

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her head, at past four in the morning, to drive to Marseilles in a taxi."

"No. There's certainly something in that," admitted Isadora, reflectively. "But Sewell, how like Mussolini you're getting!"

No compliment was intended by this comment. On the contrary, Isadora had no patience with the leader of Italy; and she only waited for the opportunity to tell him so. At the time there were being syndicated in several of the papers Mussolini's articles on the manner in which he conducted his life. From these it appeared that, quite naturally, every minute of his day was accounted for beforehand. At 6.30 he had a glass of milk and a biscuit. At 6.35 he went for a ride on his horse. At 7.5 he returned from his ride on his horse. At 7.6 . . .

"What a man!" cried Isadora, who was exasperated by the mere suggestion of routine in daily life, and wanted a world ruled by artists. "How unnatural he must be. What an ugly mind he must have. Probably he would enjoy the mechanical movements of the Russian Ballet; he would see nothing wrong in the Bacchanal of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* being danced in stiff skirts, by three dancers standing on their

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toes in ballet slippers—which was what I actually saw at Bayreuth.”

To point out to Isadora that probably Mussolini had not the time in which to interest himself in dancing, was useless. Impatiently she quoted Nietzsche, who said: “Let that day be called lost on which I have not danced.”

Often I have imagined the meeting between Isadora and Mussolini. Perhaps my conception of the scene is not very different from what might really have taken place had those two geniuses, so opposite in their mode of expression, met. Before long Isadora would, I feel certain, have realized the greatness of her enemy’s personality. After which she would not have hesitated to ask Italy’s leader to give her a child. Always she was frank in her desire that her children should be by great men. And had Mussolini, surprised at her request, questioned her morals, she would have replied to him as she once replied to a woman critic: “Madam,” she said on that occasion, “I consider myself extremely moral, because in all my relations I have only made movements which seem beautiful to me.”

That reply of Isadora’s is not so obscure when one comes to consider the enormous importance

which she attached to all movements. To her, movements were of far greater importance than words. While many conventional people were shocked at Isadora's behaviour, at the things she said, at what she did ; she in her turn was usually appalled by their manners, and invariably horrified by all their movements. Which was partly why G—— and I tried often to persuade her to dine with us at our little hotel. But she never would. Anxious to hear her put her own case to these dull people, we pointed out to her how amusing she was likely to find the severe *ladies* from the English provinces.

“ But I should be so bored,” she said ; “ and I am too old to be bored. It is not the smallness of the hotel I mind. I'm tired of the Negresco, and all its smart and silly people, and ladies from the English provinces, I should find nothing beautiful in them either.”

Certainly Isadora would have found little beauty had she dined with us. After dinner, in the drawing-room (a remarkably English room upholstered in red plush, garnished with dust-covered aspidistras, and planted with imitation bronze ornaments of a feathery lightness) she would have been infuriated by the ‘ guests ’

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dancing to a gramophone. The latest dances—and the ‘young ladies’ at our hotel did nothing if not the *latest* dances—profoundly shocked Isadora. At the sight of one of these young people—hailing from Balham, in which locality she was doubtless considered a paragon of the virtues—dancing the Black-Bottom, Isadora would, I am sure, have started up from her chair. What she would have said, I can guess. She said it often, and put it very concisely in an article she was at this time writing for the *Theatre Arts Monthly*.

“People,” she wrote, “have an entirely false conception of the importance of words in comparison with other modes of expression, just as potent as words. An entire audience of so-called respectable people, who would leave the theatre if anyone appeared to blaspheme or to use indecent words, will sit through a performance in which someone makes indecent movements, which if translated into words, would make the audience rush from the theatre. A seemingly modest young girl would not think of addressing a young man in lines or spoken phrases which were indecent, and yet the same girl will arise and dance these phrases with him

in such dances as the Charleston and Black-Bottom, while a negro orchestra is playing *Shake that thing!*

“It is because of this, that theatre censors have descended upon plays in New York and threatened to put their casts in jail for immoral propaganda, while in the music hall next door the movements of the dancers, if put into words, would be of such filth and immorality that it would be closed at once by the police. This is true because people have not learned that the expression of movement and of musical sounds is quite as clear to those who understand it as words are. To anyone who is as sensitive to movements as I am, nine-tenths of the movements that are made in the ordinary drawing-room would be shocking, not because of their indecency but because of their indecent sterility. Therefore, I condemn the modern dances not so much for the indecency of their expression as because they are essentially sterile and futile. Young people who practise them for any length of time generally become as futile and frivolous as the movements they have been practising, just as their minds would become if they were fed continually on a diet of penny novels and

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bad poems. I say it is of the utmost importance to a nation to train its children to the understanding and execution of movements of great heroic and spiritual beauty ; to raise their many bans on the realization of sex, which is a fine thing in itself, and to put these same prohibitions on the frivolous caricatures and symbols of sex which are found in such dances as the fox trot and Black-Bottom."

But to return to the evening on which Isadora expressed the fear that I was in danger of becoming as practical as Mussolini. To avoid further argument as to the advisability of driving, at dawn, to Marseilles, I suggested it was time we parted. The mere suggestion, though, of being left alone, at once frightened Isadora.

"Come to the studio," she said. "I have told you before that somehow I don't feel safe left alone. I might do *anything*."

"You mean you might think of suicide again," I said. "Isadora, that is too silly. Besides, the more you talk about suicide the less likely you are to take the idea seriously."

I had hoped, by pretending to treat the subject lightly, to drive the foolish idea out of her head altogether. But I was to be disappointed. As

we crossed the deserted Place Massena she said :

“What a perfectly absurd idea it is that the more people talk about suicide the less likely they are to commit it. Yessenin (the young Russian poet whom Isadora married in Moscow in 1922) was always threatening to kill himself. At a dinner-party I gave one night in Paris, he tried to hang himself. When my guests were shown into the dining-room they discovered him suspended from the lamp. But he was not dead. So they only laughed. They told me it was very silly of me to worry, that he was only trying to frighten me. But you see what happened to the poor boy in the end.”*

The only other occasion on which Isadora mentioned her husband to me was when she happened one evening to come across a cutting from a newspaper referring to his death.

“He was a great poet, even if he did knock me about,” she said, throwing the cutting aside. “Once I took him to see Maxim Gorky and got him to read some of his poetry. Gorky, when he’d heard the poems, said : ‘Take care of that young man. He is a genius.’ ”

* Isadora obtained a Soviet divorce from Serge Yessenin in February, 1924. He later married a granddaughter of Tolstoy, and soon after ended his life by slashing his wrists and hanging himself in Leningrad.

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After that Isadora changed the subject. She began to talk about a Russian cabaret there was in Nice, (the one place left in the world, she declared, where she was still allowed to sign the bill only!) but one could see that she was still thinking of her husband. She must at one time have loved him very much. From Mr. Hannen Swaffer, the only English journalist she seemed to remember, I have heard how she loved him. Knowing Isadora it is simple to imagine the scene he described.

“She had brought to Berlin,” Swaffer told me, “only some Russian rugs, some carvings made from the roots of trees, a few books, and of all things in the world, a husband! During that stay in Berlin Isadora talked to me for hours. She arranged her bedroom with her new art exhibits from Russia, and then she would lie on the bed and watch her young husband write poetry. ‘Isn’t he beautiful?’ she said to me. ‘I cannot speak a word of Russian, and he cannot speak a word of anything else. We talk love with our eyes.’”

Swaffer added: “I think she must have loved Serge Yessenin, who was an extraordinary young man. Even before the days of the Russian

Revolution, they say, he once smacked the Czarina on the back. He did worse than that to Isadora. He lost his temper and threw things. He broke her works of art."

Arrived at the studio we sat and drank beer, because, as Isadora remarked, there was no champagne. And, she added, one *must* drink something. Then, remembering how little I drank myself, she said :

"Though of course you and Mr. Selfridge never touch wine. I can't understand it. Life only gives one glimpses of ephemeral joy, and these through love, or art, or wine."

Isadora talked always of Mr. Selfridge as she talked of Mussolini. She had met him on several occasions. Personally she liked him. But in the abstract he was her enemy. He was included in her attack on millionaires.

"Millionaires don't do anything for beauty," she would cry. "I ask them for a few paltry thousands for my school, and they say they have nothing to give."

Once she told me that she would be able to run Mr. Selfridge's store for him, on her own lines. I laughed. But she was serious. Recently I sat opposite Mr. Selfridge in his palatial office

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at the very top of the still more palatial building his genius has brought into being.

"Could Isadora have helped you to run your business?" I asked him.

Mr. Selfridge removed his pince-nez, shook his head.

"I admired Miss Duncan," he said. "I admired her great intellect. I found her conversation most interesting. But she was an artist, with all the eccentricities of an artist. I could have found no place for her in my store."

Leaving Mr. Selfridge after this interview I had the impression that he was a very tired man. Beneath the spotless perfection of his city clothes he appeared weary. As weary as Isadora herself had been. Neither of them had seemed to me to be happy. Probably Mr. Selfridge is less happy than the hundreds of clerks in his store. Certainly Isadora, except when she was dancing or heard music, was more miserable than any little dancer in the back row of the ballet.

Putting down the glass out of which she had been slowly sipping her beer, Isadora suddenly decided to entertain me with an impromptu burlesque. In precisely the deferential tone of

a 'society' entertainer, she said, as she walked to the middle of the room :

"Just a few impersonations. With your kind permission I will first endeavour . . ."

Then, to my utter surprise, she began to impersonate the Theory of Isadora Duncan. Several times before I had seen people, without sufficient knowledge to appreciate Isadora's art, caricature it ; but never had I watched such a brilliant travesty of it as now. Nobody, except possibly Ruth Draper, could have been so completely a *diseuse* as Isadora was then, and the satire of herself might have been written by Noel Coward, so devastatingly true was every word of it.

Without warning Isadora turned herself into a conscientious mistress in one of the many schools of dancing, which, since her own first school began, have sprung up all over the world. Before her one imagined a class of ambitious, if unsuitable girls, whose fond parents were all anxious for them to learn the beauty of movement.

"Girls," cried this teacher archly, "I want you all to remember the words of the great Isadora. Remember, Isadora says : 'Dance the sky, dance the air, dance the sea.' Now girls,

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I want you all, with me, to dance the sky, and the air, and the sea. Ready girls . . . ? ”

Isadora then quickly became one of the ‘girls’ in question. How she accomplished this illusion, I do not know. Simply, I suppose, she had the art of the *diseuse* at her finger-tips. For immediately there stood in the teacher’s place a plump and sullen schoolgirl of eighteen. Actually a heavy-footed schoolgirl, on whose pink suety face one could count the pimples of adolescence.

This girl, with comic results, did her best to follow the teacher’s instructions. While endeavouring to ‘dance the air’ she succeeded only in convincing the spectator that her poor feet were eternally clamped to the ground.

“*Poise*, Isadora says *poise*,”—the teacher’s voice, returning for a moment, cried—and watching the poise of the unfortunate girl, who reminded one of the children trying to fly in *Peter Pan*, my eyes filled with the tears of laughter. While her arms made fruitless efforts to raise her large body towards the ceiling, her feet buried themselves in the ground ; and her determined expression suggested, especially about the

lines of the mouth, that of a harassed goldfish. It was convulsively amusing.

"Antics like those I've just performed," said Isadora, returning, and drinking the beer left in her glass, "are being made by schoolgirls all over the world, every day. And *I'm* blamed for it. No wonder my methods are laughed at, caricatured. But schools like these are just burlesques of my ideas. That's what I want to put right. The women who run these institutions on the shadows of my inspiration are artistic frauds. I'm told that in America there is now a woman calling herself the Crimson Mother, who supervises one of these schools. She appears each morning, just for a few moments, from behind curtains, and addresses her disciples, using a distortion of my own ideas. For that she receives an enormous income. I'm penniless. Nobody will listen to me. I started the revival of classical dancing, but now the whole thing has grown beyond me, in a hopelessly wrong direction. I feel sometimes that my art has been wasted . . ."

To avoid those tears which so easily came to the surface with Isadora when she allowed her mind to dwell on the futility of life—as it always

did when she could not find some kind of soporific—I changed the subject by handing her a letter I had that morning received from Bernard Shaw. It was an amusing reply to a letter of mine, in which I had asked Mr. Shaw to confirm a point in the discussion (which I think has not been made public) between himself and Mr. Frank Harris, concerning his play *Saint Joan*.

“I could have played the part of Saint Joan,” Isadora declared. “I *ought* to have played it. I have the ample figure, the hardy physique of a farm-servant. Joan was a buxom creature. Yet she is always played by thin little actresses like Gramatica and Pitoeff.”

I believe she would have played the heroine of Shaw’s drama magnificently. I have seen *Saint Joan* acted in Italy, in France, and in England; well acted on each occasion, but I cannot help feeling that Isadora would have triumphed over the other actresses. She had about her as she moved and spoke that fiery inspiration, which, for all the brilliance of their technique, I have never noticed in the work of Gramatica, Pitoeff, or Sybil Thorndike. Had she wished it, Isadora could have become as great an actress as she was a dancer. And what

a dramatic critic she would have made, too. Of her great friend she wrote :

“ In 1899 I first saw Eleonora Duse in London, playing in a third-rate play called *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. The play goes through two acts of utter vulgarity and banality and I was shocked to see the divine Duse lending herself to such commonplace characterization. At the end of the third act, where Mrs. Tanqueray is driven to the wall by her enemies, and, overcome with ennui, resolves to commit suicide, there was a moment when the Duse stood quite still, alone on the stage. Suddenly, without any special outward movement, she seemed to grow and grow until her head appeared to touch the roof of the theatre, like the moment when Demeter appeared before the house of Metaneira and disclosed herself a Goddess. In that supreme gesture Duse was no longer the second Mrs. Tanqueray, but some wonderful Goddess of all ages, and her growth before the eyes of the audience into that divine presence was one of the greatest artistic achievements I have ever witnessed. I remember that I went home dazed with the wonder of it. I said to myself, when I can come on the stage and stand as still as

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Eleonora Duse did to-night, and, at the same time, create that tremendous force of dynamic movement, then I will be the greatest dancer in the world. At that point in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, Duse's spirit rose to such exalted heights that she became a part of the movement of the spheres."

My thoughts of how great Isadora would have been in the rôle of *Saint Joan* were interrupted by her doing a sudden, and very convincing character sketch.

She stood, one elbow resting on the piano, and her legs crossed, and there seemed to sprout from her the skirt of a frock-coat: her neck engulfed itself in a high stiff collar, and a moustache, one end of which she stroked affectionately between the lines of her deep-voiced recitation, appeared actually to be there. As she brought forth, with studied solemnity, some lines from Tennyson, the whole atmosphere of the studio became changed. Where a few minutes before Jean Cocteau might have felt at home, was now scarcely room, between the plush and antimacassars, for the ghosts of Aubrey Beardsley and Queen Victoria to squeeze past.

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Her brilliant performance came to an end. And, as there was no more beer left in the bottles, Isadora returned to the only topic left which was at all likely to distract her mind from the depression which filled it. She talked again of love. She read through the love-story she had written for the films, and asked me what I thought of it. Quite candidly I was able to tell her that I thought, as a film story, it was a very excellent piece of work. It was, too. Somehow Isadora had managed, after her infrequent visits to the cinema, to derive a perfect conception of what the mass of the public will always like ; and had at the same time preserved her own intelligence.

“Take it,” she said, handing me the script. “Try to persuade some producer to accept it. As an added inducement to whoever becomes interested in it, tell them that if they like I’ll play the part of the Marchesa Romananini, the vampire. Can you think of anybody to play the hero ? ”

Several handsome young men, whose names are household-words, whose faces are household-dreams among the film ‘ fans ’ of the world, suggested themselves to my mind, when Isadora said :

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"I know Ivor Novello. He could play the hero. If I played in the film, too, I'd probably fall in love with him. That wouldn't matter, would it?"

"Of course not!"

"Only I'm not pretty."

"You're more than pretty, Isadora. You're almost beautiful."

"*Almost?*"

Isadora was silent for a moment.

"You young men," she sighed; "your generation is so *frank*."

"And not too *gallant*? I'm sorry Isadora, I didn't mean . . ."

"Now Sir Herbert Tree," Isadora waved aside my weak apology, "said to me in Berlin—I think it was in Berlin—that I was the most beautiful creature he'd ever set eyes on."

"Did his words flatter you?"

"At the time—not a bit. They bored me. While the sight of the dinner he'd ordered especially for me, tempted my appetite—for I was exceedingly hungry—he just looked at me longingly and kept repeating to himself:

"'So beautiful. So *very* beautiful. But not for me. Not for me.'"

"He would keep on"—Isadora imitated Tree's voice perfectly—"saying the same thing over and over again. 'So very beautiful. But not for me.'"

"Why not for him?"

"That," responded Isadora, "is what I've often asked myself since. Why not for him? Unless of course," she naïvely added, "he was thinking of Lady Tree. Some people dare so little—even for beauty."

"And you've dared everything," I said; "like George Sand. I expect you're rather like George Sand."

"Perhaps."

"She had a great many lovers, but she was man enough to get rid of people when they ceased to please her."

"We're different there. It's always the other people who get rid of me."

The words with which W. L. George defended George Sand against the attack made on her manner of living by Franz Liszt, might equally well serve Isadora. He said:

". . . though she was not a technically chaste woman, she always looked upon an alliance as a marriage: thus she was absolutely faithful. In

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her long life there was not one story of intrigue ; she keeps herself entirely unto the man whom she has chosen. She gives herself freely, entrusts herself wholly and withdraws herself honestly. She behaved like an honourable man, and this should entitle her to some respect.”

VII

BUT for meeting Isadora I should not have been able to boast, as some day I probably shall boast, that once I was an impresario. Never while I was with her did I wear the silk hat and fur-lined overcoat which is the insignia of the profession; however, I was, for one evening, her manager. With what results!

"Come round with G——," said Isadora's voice over the 'phone. "Come right now. I have very good news."

It was then past nine o'clock; so we arrived at the Negresco thinking to find Isadora alone, her own meal finished. Instead, she had not begun to eat, and had with her a large, middle-aged American, to whom she lost no time in introducing us.

This man, I thought, was not too pleased to see us. And when I understood the situation he had my sympathy. Isadora, it appeared, had been introduced to him during the afternoon, and together they had visited her studio. Here the stranger had been so impressed by his surroundings, and by the glamorous personality

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of his companion—whose name, he informed me, was very well-known in America—that out of the goodness of his honest, Middle-Western soul, he had promised to finance a recital for her to the extent of 5,000 francs. And Isadora had promised to dine with him.

“What I should have done,” Isadora admitted to me the next day, “was to have dined with him alone. I should have asked him to hand over the money at once, have thanked him for it, and drunk nothing but cups of strong tea for the rest of the evening. Instead I was so happy at the thought of the recital, that I lost my head. It was stupid of me. But then he was a bore, wasn’t he?”

Certainly the American was a bore. He told me exactly four times during the evening that through sheer hard work he had risen, from being an inconspicuous youth with no wealth at all, to be a member of New York’s ‘Four Hundred’. But Isadora, in her way, was equally stupid. All my admiration for her did not prevent my seeing *how* stupid. From the moment G—— and I arrived—and our arrival was in itself enough to prejudice the poor man against his original good intentions—she began

gently to poke fun at him. She did not mean to be unkind, or inconsiderate. She knew only that she was an artist, that she had the right to be surrounded by beautiful things; but that she could find no beauty in the man from the Middle-West. She was, in her excitement at having gained even such a small backer as this American, carried out of herself. She became the Isadora Duncan whose art had some years before inflamed great minds; whose schemes for the training of a nation's children, Lenin himself had paused to admire. 'To-night,' her attitude said, 'I will forget how unhappy I really am. *I will be happy.* I will have everything I want, as I had it in the past. I will be so happy that I will forget, when I go to bed, that I have to wake up again in the morning. I'll even forget that Mitri has not written to me.'

"You must come along and dine with us, at once," she commanded G—— and myself. "My friend here," she indicated the surprised American, "is going to give us all a marvellous dinner."

"We've already dined," I said.

"But you must come along all the same. Mustn't they?" she added, turning sharply on the American.

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"I'll be pleased if you will," said that surprised man, in a tone that was scarcely enthusiastic.

At a table at the Café de Paris we all four eventually settled down to quite the most awkward meal at which I have ever been present. Yet I should have been sorry to have missed it. For it was an intensely interesting meal, in that it brought out the characteristics of the three diners who sat in a row in front of me. That I refused any food, at once put me on the right side of our unwilling host, who already glimpsed, in Isadora's choice of a menu, what proportions the bill was likely to assume by the end of the evening.

"Of course, this is just a scratch little meal," Isadora cried, scornfully, with stifled laughter in her throat, "but it reminds me of the last time I had dinner with a rich countryman of mine. When he got the bill for what I'd chosen, he nearly passed away. Being a mean man he'd asked me to dine alone with him. But knowing his meanness I wasn't flattered. And I turned up with four other guests. All of them wanted a good meal, poor things. And they got it, too. It was really an act of mercy on my part; but

you should just have seen the American's face"

Isadora laughed at the recollection. I wanted to laugh, too; at the face of our host. But I managed to look very seriously at Isadora, hoping to make her realize the tactlessness of her joke. She only laughed more. One would have thought, to hear her, that it was the funniest, instead of the most ill-timed story she could have chosen to tell. Presently, out of politeness, the American laughed. But this expression of his mirth sounded strangely as one imagines the death-rattle to sound.

G—— would have done better to refuse that evening's hospitality, but, like Isadora, he had at that time what can best be described as a 'Truffle-and-Champagne' outlook on life. With every extravagant whim she gave rein to, he acquiesced, until the head-waiter's face positively beamed with pleasure.

The first serious intimation of the American's annoyance came when, turning to me, he said: "Mind-control, that's a great thing with me. Five minutes ago I was on the point of leaving this table. But I said to myself, 'No,' I said, 'to leave this table would be a weakness. Stay

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and see the thing through!’ And that’s what I’m going to do, until the bill arrives.”

“Isn’t it sweet of G—— to say that?” Isadora presently inquired of the American.

“To say what?”

“That he thought this champagne wasn’t at all bad.”

“Very sweet of him, I’m sure,” said the American, who then turned to me again: “You’re interested in literature,” he went on: “well, it may, or it may not interest you to know that last night I read the best short story in the world. I tell you, when I read that story, I cried.”

“Do you,” Isadora interrupted us again—and it was difficult not to laugh with her—“like Walt Whitman?”

“I don’t know him,” said the American. “As I was saying,” he turned to me again, “this short story seemed to me to be the most real thing I had ever read. It’s in the *Saturday Evening Post*. I’ve got the copy in my bedroom at the hotel. If you’d care to come back with me after dinner, I’d like to read it to you.”

I will say for the American that he was polite to ‘Miss Duncan’ as he called her—a form of address that in spite of its correctness sounded

quite absurd when applied to Isadora—but after a very short time he lost all interest in her and in G——. Of the fact that before long he would be called upon to pay the bill for what they were eating, he was painfully conscious, but apart from that he endeavoured to forget them both. His election to New York's 'Four Hundred' had evidently not been for his skill in dealing with the eccentricities of genius. He could no more understand Isadora's impulsively luxurious attitude that night, than she could understand the simple ordinariness of his Middle-Western culture.

His whole outlook on life was as far apart from Isadora's as that of a certain woman, of about Isadora's own age, who called to see her one afternoon when I was sorting some press-cuttings for her in that untidy room at the Negresco. The lady was a singer, an English concert singer. She had a voice, but little else. She came into the room like a healthy breeze. She was as 'bright as a new pin'. There had been some talk of her giving a recital with Isadora. Why, I cannot imagine. Some months before, Jean Cocteau and Isadora had been wonderful, working together at an improvised

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recital. But this woman was such a very different proposition. She was 'Angela Brazilian'. She took a seat, crossed her legs, and in crisp tones said :

"I'd love to sing at your recital. You have someone to put up the money, of course?"

"I haven't anybody to put up a penny," replied Isadora, whose red hair, I remember, held the other woman fascinated. "Not a penny."

"Oh, well, then it's no use our discussing the matter. I understood you had found the money."

As they talked they eyed one another with acute curiosity. Each wondered how and why the other had a place in the scheme of the cosmos.

"I understood you could put up the money," said Isadora.

"Oh no," brightly, from the other.

"Then perhaps you know a rich man who could."

"Oh no."

"A rich woman, then."

" !!! "

As I saw the good lady down to the hotel lounge she said : "Of course Isadora is *quite*

impossible.” And when I returned to her room Isadora said: “How very English that woman was. I can hear her singing some such song as ‘Won’t You Buy My Lavender?’ If I were a man I wouldn’t buy anything from her.”

At the end of dinner the American and I left Isadora with G——. Unwillingly, but with the idea in mind that I might even yet persuade him to take a more tolerant view of the evening’s entertainment, for which he had just paid, I went to hear my companion read his short story.

“You know,” he said to me, as we walked across to the Avenue Victor Hugo, “I never thought Miss Duncan was like that.”

“Like what?”

“So extravagant.”

“She’s not, really. Only to-night she was a little excited.”

“Really? Well, I’m proud to have had the pleasure of dining with Miss Duncan. I’ve kind of felt I’d like to ever since I saw her dance, some years ago, in my own country. But never again. It’s the kind of thing I only want to do once.”

I felt very angry with this man for treating Isadora as if she had been one of the ‘sights’

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towards which Baedeker directs the attention of American tourists. I tried, before we reached his hotel, to explain something of Isadora's real personality. But it was like trying to picture a rainbow with a piece of charcoal. My words made little impression.

Once inside his room, the American lost no time in putting a green shade over his eyes and settling down to read that story out of the *Saturday Evening Post*. For what seemed to me to be a very long time he mispronounced most of the words in a story about a woman whose destiny it was to shell peas for a thankless husband. In spite of attractive temptations this woman kept faithful to her husband. Only once did the American interrupt his reading, to remark, when he came to it, 'this is the part that makes me cry;' and the story must have taken him an hour to read. When he had finished it, he said :

"Isn't that the most wonderful story? What a girlie"—he was talking of the heroine of the story—"for a man to be married to, eh?"

"What a bore!" was what I felt inclined to say. But as I said nothing, he went on :

"How many women are good and sweet

like that girlie in the story ? Poor little thing. It's enough to make a man cry, eh ? Different from the lady we had dinner with to-night."

"Which reminds me," I said, smiling, "Isadora said something about your financing a recital for her. I'm so glad."

The American looked at me, to make quite sure that I was in my right mind ; then he said :

"I *was* going to finance it. But not now. Not after to-night. Such an extravagant woman ! I'm very glad to have met her ; something to tell the fellows about at home ; but I'll not be her backer."

After I had managed to escape from the bar into which the American—still with the object of making me understand that I had that night heard him read a story about the best little girlie in the world—had taken me, I went straight to the Negresco to find Isadora and G——. I decided to scold them both. Isadora for spoiling her own chances ; G—— for helping her to spoil them.

When I arrived on the third floor of the hotel I noticed that her door was just open, throwing a narrow streak of light across the red carpet of the corridor. Very softly I pushed my way

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in. Standing in the passage outside the bedroom I called her name twice. As there was no answer I went into the room, and glanced round it.

Isadora was alone. She lay sprawled on the bed, asleep, her mouth open, snoring loudly. The disorder of her red hair spread on the pillow made her face seem floating in a pool of blood. She looked tired, old. Only one of the lights was turned on, casting the room into weird shadows.

Sitting in an armchair opposite her, I thought, as I watched her, of those lines in Mr. Arnold Bennett's *Old Wives' Tale* in which Sophia, who has not seen her husband for many years, at last looks on his dead body.

“What affected her was that he had once been young, and that he had grown old, and was now dead. That was all. Youth and vigour had come to that. Youth and vigour always came to that. Everything came to that By the corner of her eye, reflected in the mirror of a wardrobe near the bed, she glimpsed a tall, forlorn woman, who had once been young and now was old ; who had once exulted in abundant strength, and trodden proudly on the neck

of circumstance, and now was old. He and she had once loved and burned and quarrelled in the glittering and scornful pride of youth. But time had worn them out”

Those lines from the novel which will probably preserve Mr. Bennett's name for posterity, are not, in detail, applicable to Isadora. But the drift of them caught my imagination as I watched her. Except that she snored, she might have been dead. ‘Youth and vigour had come to that,’ were the words I repeated to myself. Also: ‘She had once loved and burned and quarrelled in the glittering and scornful pride of youth.’ And I remember thinking that as applied to Isadora the words sounded even more pathetic. For heedless of what time had done to her, she still loved and burned and quarrelled. About her, as she lay snoring, was not the tragedy of death, but the far greater tragedy of an unsatisfied life.

“How unlike,” was my next thought, “she is to the sweet girlie in the American short story. How much more beautiful.”

For she was still a beautiful woman, as Venice is still a beautiful city. Even those loud snores could not destroy the tragic beauty of her.

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I am not sorry now that I waited in the room with her for quite ten minutes. One is seldom conscious, at the time of their happening, of the most important events in one's life ; but sitting in that room, alone with the snoring Isadora, I realized that, to me, the situation was psychologically important. Shortly after Isadora's death a woman wrote to me : " What a pity you had left Nice. Had you been there you might have been one of the ten people who sat up all night in the studio with the body."

Though for me personally the words that woman wrote have no significance, I see clearly what she meant by them. To her *crêpe-stuffed* mind—and most of us have *crêpe-stuffed* minds—the idea of ten sad people crouched round Isadora's poor lifeless body, appeared as something beautiful, respectful. Doubtless all of the ten people felt that too. But my own feeling, had I been present among them, would have been that of experiencing something for the second time. And I should have felt that now the experience mattered less than it had done before.

For to me—strange as it may sound to some others—Isadora was more pitifully lifeless before

her death than after it. The tired woman I watched in her bedroom at the Negresco was in life forgotten by all save a few friends ; but her death, news of which was cabled to the four corners of the earth, brought her the sympathy and eulogy which before it she had needed so badly.

Watching her in the bedroom that night, I remember, I tried to account for the various circumstances which had seduced Isadora from her original conceptions of physical beauty, to a toleration of her now far less beautiful self. Then it was I remembered a certain important moment in her career, which brings me back to M.M.'s *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion*, the book, with an introduction by D. H. Lawrence, which I mentioned early in my first chapter. The moment, which she believed to have been the turning point in Isadora's life, was recalled for me by a great friend of hers.

"Isadora," said this friend, "had just lost her two lovely children. The world was still talking of the tragedy, of the fatal morning on which, with their nurse, they were hurled into the Seine through a motor accident. Isadora was inconsolable. She could no longer find a reason for living. Nobody could do anything

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with her. Then, I can see him now," said the friend, "Maurice Magnus, who was her secretary, approached her with a cocktail in each hand, and begged her to drink them up, to try to forget. And she drank them both, and tried to take his advice. But she never forgot."

That very simple story explained everything. If everybody had heard it many hearts might have been softened towards Isadora. Even the prim spinster ladies at my hotel, had they known that most of the things Isadora did were done to try and make herself forget, might have unbent a little.

* * * * *

The following morning, as I have said, Isadora was sorry : "But he was a bore," she added.

"He was a bore, but he would have financed your recital."

"Oh well, what does it matter ?"

She stretched out her lovely arms, and smiled.

"It matters very much," I said.

"Not very much. Not now."

"Not now ? Why not now ?"

"Because," she said, "this morning I've had a letter from Mitri. I must go to Paris."

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It was foolish of me, but after that I lost patience. Sometimes I feel ashamed of myself for not having seen Isadora off at the station; angry, that instead of kissing her farewell, I only watched her from my window. But my anger is silly, for probably I should do the same to-day, were she still alive.

They sent up to Isadora's room, the day before she left the Negresco, a printed slip informing her that if she did not pay the bill by a given time she would have to leave the hotel.

"As it's only printed," she said, "I don't so much mind. It shows how used they must be to people like me."

To leave the hotel, to escape from her prison, as she called it, she had to pawn her friend's car. Then there was enough money left over, after buying her ticket, to get a few oranges for the journey. But not enough to tip the porter.

* * * * *

The newspaper in which I read of Isadora's death was dated September 15, 1927. While in a car, wrote the Nice correspondent, the ends of her scarf became entangled in the front wheels,

and she was thrown on to the pavement, strangled.

I fancied, as I put down the paper, that I heard a great sigh going up from the public, a sigh in which curiosity was mingled with regret. For curiosity was a trait with which all her life Isadora managed, unintentionally, to inspire the public mind. From the time when she lived in New York ; and, having no money, walked to and from rehearsals ; until the evening of her death, when again she was almost as poor ; the eyes of two continents followed her movements. During her lifetime she became a legend.

Few people possess that quality of genius which converts them into a legend even before they are dead. Fewer still find themselves the heroine of such a bizarre legend as Isadora's. Her life, as viewed by the world, solely through the newspapers, appeared incomprehensible. Which is why most of the people I meet profess to know all about her. For those failing to grasp a subject, invariably, from sheer defensiveness, pretend to understand it completely.

From a poor girl with nothing save her conception of beauty, she rose, in a remarkably short time, to be a rich and famous woman. The most revolutionary, and adored dancer of her

generation, she created for herself an enormous following. Finally she faded from the public's interest as a dancer, becoming instead the object of that sensational curiosity which most of us feel about a celebrity who has dared the conventions. With that bias in mind, I believe, the majority read the news of her death.

The foregoing pages I have written in the hope that they may dispel some of the hide-bound convictions which are so widely held concerning her. Of the inadequacy of the portrait I am aware; but if only for a moment it enables Isadora to step out from the legend which surrounds her, I shall feel satisfied. If in it there is to be caught a glimpse of the truth—that her many amours never sullied the innate purity of her—the portrait will have achieved its object.

As I am about to end this book, there comes to my notice the following paragraph in an evening paper :

“I hear that the friends of the late Isadora Duncan, the famous dancer, who met with such a tragic death recently, are subscribing to a fund with which it is proposed to erect a monument

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to her memory at Nice. She is to be represented in a characteristic pose, wearing a short diaphanous tunic ; her clasped hands holding a rose from which the petals are falling."

For all one can tell, the monument may be beautiful. It sounds appalling. But it may be beautiful. One night, when I am in Nice, I shall go, alone, or with G——, to see it. My emotions, as I gaze up at it, can at present be only conjectures. But it is doubtful that I shall stand before it, hat in hand, solemnly. More probably I shall laugh. And Isadora's spirit, that will have 'sloped' through the night with me, will be laughing, too.

"They might, just for humanity's sake," I can hear her drawling, "have put a cocktail in my hand instead of a rose. But how perfectly sweet of them, anyway."

She will have forgotten then what she said to me shortly before her death, when she seemed to have no friends :

"Why do they always wait till one is dead to send the flowers ? "

London. October, 1927.

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